

# **CHRISTIANITY AS MYSTICAL FACT**

## **AND THE MYSTERIES OF ANTIQUITY**

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# Table of Contents

[Preface to the Second Edition](#)  
[Points of View](#)  
[Mysteries and Mystery Wisdom](#)  
[Greek Sages before Plato in the Light of Mystery Wisdom](#)  
[Plato as a Mystic](#)  
[Mystery, Wisdom and Myth](#)  
[Egyptian Mystery Wisdom](#)  
[The Gospels](#)  
[The Miracle of the Raising of Lazarus](#)  
[The Apocalypse of John](#)  
[Jesus and His Historical Background](#)  
[The Essence of Christianity](#)  
[Christianity and Pagan Wisdom](#)  
[Augustine and the Church](#)  
[Comments by the Author](#)

## **Preface to the Second Edition**

CHRISTIANITY AS MYSTICAL FACT was the title given to this book by its author when eight years ago he included in it the contents of lectures held in the year 1902. This title was intended to indicate the particular character of the book. It represents an attempt to describe not merely the mystical content of Christianity in its historical form, but how Christianity arose out of mystical conception. Underlying this was the idea that involved in this process was a spiritual reality which can be seen only through such conception. Only the content of the book can prove that the author has not used the word "mystical" to denote a conception which relies more on indefinite knowledge gained through feelings, than on "strictly scientific exposition." In many circles today the word "mysticism" carries such a connotation, hence the tendency is to explain this as a region of the life of the human soul which can have nothing to do with "real science." In this book the word "mysticism" is used for the exposition of a spiritual fact whose nature can be recognized only when the powers of cognition are taken from the source of spiritual life itself. Whoever declines a method of cognition founded on such a source will be unable to take any position with regard

to this book. Only one who admits that in “mysticism” the same clarity can exist as in the truthful exposition of natural phenomena will accept this method of describing the mystical content of Christianity. For even more important than the content of the text is the means of cognition which has led to its existence.

In our present day many people violently abhor such a means of cognition. They see it as contradictory to true scientific method. This is the case not only among those who will not allow the validity of any interpretation of the world which is not founded upon “genuine natural scientific fact,” but also among those who wish to consider Christianity in the capacity of believers. The author of this text takes as his basis an interpretation which acknowledges that the natural scientific achievements of our day demand elevation to true mysticism. This interpretation can show that any other attitude toward cognition absolutely contradicts everything offered by natural scientific achievements. The means of cognition which so many people who assume that they stand on firm natural scientific ground, would like to use, simply do not embrace the facts of this natural science.

Only that reader will accept this book who is able to admit that full understanding of our present

marvelous knowledge of nature can be combined with genuine mysticism.

By means of what is here called “mystical cognition” this book sets out to show how the source of Christianity created its preliminary conditions in the ancient Mysteries. In this “pre-Christian mysticism” is demonstrated the soil in which Christianity germinates as an independent seed. This point of view enables one to understand Christianity in its independent essence, although at the same time one can follow its development out of pre-Christian mysticism. If one ignores this point of view it is only too easy to miss recognition of its independence through the belief that Christianity is merely a further development of what existed in pre-Christian mysticism. Many opinions of today lapse into this error, comparing Christianity with pre-Christian viewpoints, believing that the Christian viewpoint is merely a further development of the pre-Christian. This book sets out to show that Christianity presupposes the previous mysticism as the plant seed does its soil. It seeks to emphasize the unique essence of Christianity through cognition of its origin, not to extinguish it.

It gives the author profound satisfaction to mention that this exposition of the “essence of Christianity”

has met with the assent of a personality whose notable writings on the spiritual life of mankind have enriched the thoughts of our time in the deepest sense. *Édouard Schuré*, author of *Les Grands Initiés*, *The Great Initiates*, agreed so thoroughly with the standpoint of this book that he himself undertook its translation into French under the title: *Le mystère chrétien et les mystères antiques*. The fact that the first edition was translated into French and other European languages is mentioned here as a symptom of the great longing of the present day to understand the essence of Christianity in the sense of this book.

The author has not found occasion to make any essential changes in this second edition. There are, however, extensions of the exposition made eight years ago. The effort has also been made to state many things more fully and accurately than was possible then. Unfortunately, through volume of work the author has been forced to allow a long interval to elapse between the time when the first edition went out of print and the appearance of the second.

Rudolf Steiner  
May, 1910

## **Points of View**

NATURAL SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT has deeply influenced the formulation of present-day ideas. It is becoming more and more impossible to describe the spiritual requirements of the “life of the soul” without reference to the methods of thinking and the conclusions of natural science. However, it must be admitted that many people satisfy these requirements without taking into account the trend of natural scientific thought in modern spiritual life. But those who are alert to the pulse of the times must take this trend into consideration. Ideas derived from natural science conquer our thought-life with gathering momentum, and our unwilling hearts follow hesitantly and with apprehension. Not only the *number* thus conquered is important: there is a power inherent in natural scientific thought which convinces the observant that a modern conception of the world cannot exclude its impressions. Several of the side-growths of natural scientific thought *compel* us to reject which this method of thought has gained widespread recognition and attracts people as if by magic. The situation is not altered by the fact that isolated individuals can see how true science, through its own power has “long” led beyond the “shallow

doctrines of force and matter,” taught by materialism. It appears to be far more important to heed those who boldly declare that a new religion should be built on natural scientific ideas. Even if such people seem shallow and superficial to those who know the deeper spiritual requirements of humanity, nevertheless they should be noted because they claim attention in the present time, and there is good reason to believe that they will win increasing recognition in the future. And those also must be considered who have allowed their heads to take precedence over their hearts. These people are unable to free their intellects from natural scientific ideas. They are oppressed by the need for proof. But the religious needs of their souls cannot be satisfied by these natural scientific ideas. The latter offer too comfortless a perspective for their satisfaction. Why be enthusiastic about beauty, truth and goodness if in the end everything is to be swept away into nothingness like a bubble of inflated brain tissue? This is a feeling which oppresses many people like a nightmare. Therefore scientific ideas also oppress them, pressing their claims with tremendous authoritative force. As long as they can, these people remain blind to the discord in their souls. Indeed, they comfort themselves by saying that true clarity in these matters is denied the human soul. They think in accordance with natural science so long as the



experience of their senses and logic demand it, but they keep to the religious sentiments in which they have been educated, preferring to remain in darkness concerning these matters, a darkness which clouds their understanding. They have not the courage to struggle through to clarity.

There can be no doubt whatever that the method of thought derived from natural science is the greatest power in modern spiritual life. And one who speaks of the spiritual concerns of mankind may not pass it by heedlessly. Nevertheless it is also true that the method by which it attempts to satisfy spiritual needs is shallow and superficial. If this were the right method the outlook would indeed be comfortless. Would it not be depressing to be forced to agree with those who say, "Thought is a form of force. We *walk* with the same force with which we think. Man is an organism that changes several forms of force into thought-force. Man is a machine into which we put what we call food, and produce what we call thought. Think of that wonderful chemistry by which bread was changed into the divine tragedy of *Hamlet*!" This is quoted from a lecture of Robert G. Ingersoll, titled *The Gods*. It is irrelevant that such thoughts, casually expressed, apparently receive little recognition. The main point is that countless people, influenced by the natural

scientific method of thought, seem compelled to assume an attitude in line with the above quotation, even when they believe they are not doing so.

The situation would indeed be comfortless if natural science itself forced us to the credo advanced by many of its newer prophets. Matters would be entirely comfortless for one who has become convinced from the content of this natural science that its method of thought is valid and unshakeable in the realm of nature. Such a person must say to himself, However much people may quarrel over individual questions, though volume after volume may be written and observation upon observation collected about the “struggle for existence” and its insignificance, about the “omnipotence” or “powerlessness” of “natural selection,” natural science itself moves on in one direction, and must find increasing agreement within certain limits.

But are the demands made by natural science really as they are described by some of its representatives? The behavior of these representatives themselves proves that this is not the case. Their behavior in their own field is not such as many describe and demand in other fields. Would Darwin and Ernst Haeckel ever have made their great discoveries about the evolution

of life if, instead of observing life and the structure of living beings, they had gone into the laboratory to make chemical experiments with tissue cut out of an organism? Would Lyell have been able to describe the development of the crust of the earth if, instead of examining strata and their contents, he had analyzed the chemical qualities of innumerable stones? Let us really follow in the footsteps of these explorers who appear as monumental figures in the development of modern science! We shall then apply to the higher regions of spiritual life what they have applied in the field of the observation of nature. Then we shall not believe we have understood the essence of the “divine” tragedy of *Hamlet* by saying that a wonderful chemical process transformed a certain quantity of food into that tragedy. We shall believe it as little as a naturalist can seriously believe that he has understood the mission of heat in the evolution of the earth when he has studied the action of heat upon sulphur in a chemical retort. Neither does he attempt to understand the construction of the human brain by examining the effect of liquid potash upon a fragment of it, but rather by inquiring how, in the course of evolution, the brain has been developed out of the organs of lower organisms.

It is therefore quite true that one who is investigating the nature of spirit can only learn from natural science. He really needs only to do as science does. But he must not allow himself to be misled by what individual representatives of natural science would dictate to him. He must investigate in the spiritual domain as they do in the physical, but he need not adopt their opinions about the spiritual world, confused as they are by their exclusive consideration of physical phenomena.

We shall act in conformity with natural science only when we study the spiritual evolution of man just as impartially as the naturalist observes the material world. Then in the domain of spiritual life we shall admittedly be led to a method of consideration differing from the purely natural scientific method as geology differs from pure physics or the investigation of the evolution of life from research into purely chemical laws. We shall be led to higher methods which, although they cannot be those of natural science, yet hold good in the same sense. Many a one-sided view of natural science will allow itself to be modified or corrected from another point of view, but this only leads to progress in natural science and thereby one does not sin against the latter. — Such methods alone can lead to penetration into spiritual

developments like Christianity, or the world of ideas of any other religion. Anyone applying these methods may provoke the opposition of many who believe they are thinking scientifically, but nevertheless he will know himself to be in full accord with a truly scientific method of thought.

An investigator of this kind must also go beyond a merely historical examination of the documents relating to spiritual life. This is necessary just because of the attitude of mind he has acquired from the consideration of natural occurrences. When a chemical law is explained it is of little value to describe the retorts, dishes and pincers which have led to its discovery. And in explaining the beginning of Christianity, it is of just as much or as little value to ascertain the historical sources drawn upon by the Evangelist Luke, or those from which the book of *Revelation* of John was compiled. In this case "history" can be only the outer court to research proper. By tracing the historical origin of documents we shall not discover anything about the ideas in the writings of Moses or in the traditions of the Greek mystics. In these documents the ideas in question are expressed only in outward terms. And the naturalist, investigating the nature of "man," does not concern himself about the origin of the *word* "man," or how it

has developed in a language. He keeps to the thing itself, not to the word which expresses it. And likewise, in studying spiritual life we shall have to keep to the spirit and not to its outer documents.

## **Mysteries and Mystery Wisdom**

SOMETHING LIKE A VEIL OF SECRECY conceals the manner whereby spiritual needs were satisfied for those within the older civilizations who sought a deeper religious and cognitive life than was offered by the religions of the people. We are led into the obscurity of enigmatic cults when we inquire into the satisfaction of these needs. Each individual who finds such satisfaction withdraws himself for some time from our observation. We see that the religion of the people cannot give him what his heart seeks. He acknowledges the gods, but he knows that in the ordinary conceptions of the gods the great enigmas of existence are not disclosed. He seeks a wisdom which is carefully guarded by a community of priest-sages. He seeks refuge in this community for his striving soul. If the sages find him mature they lead him step by step to higher insight, in a manner hidden from the eyes of those outside. What happens to him now is concealed from the uninitiated. For a time he appears to be entirely removed from the physical world. He appears to be transported into a secret world. — And when he is returned to the light of day a different, entirely transformed personality stands before us. This personality cannot find words sufficiently sublime to

express how significant his experiences were for him. He appears to himself as though he had gone through death and awakened to a new and higher life, not merely figuratively, but in highest reality. And it is clear to him that no one can rightly understand his words who has not had the same experience.

Thus it was with those persons who through the Mysteries were initiated into that secret wisdom, withheld from the people, and which shed light upon the highest questions. This “secret” religion of the elect existed side by side with the religion of the people. So far as history is concerned, its source fades into the obscurity where the origin of peoples is lost. We find this “secret” religion everywhere among ancient peoples insofar as we can gain insight concerning them. The sages of these peoples speak of the Mysteries with the greatest reverence. — What was concealed in them? And what did they reveal to one who was initiated into them?

The enigma becomes still more puzzling when we realize that at the same time the ancients regarded the Mysteries as something dangerous. The way leading to the secrets of existence went through a world of terrors. And woe to him who tried to reach them unworthily. — There was no greater crime than



the “betrayal” of these secrets to the uninitiated. The “traitor” was punished with death and confiscation of property. We know that the poet Aeschylus was accused of having brought something from the Mysteries to the stage. He was able to escape death only by fleeing to the altar of Dionysus and producing legal evidence that he was not an initiate.

What the ancients say about these secrets is rich in meaning and can be variously interpreted. The initiate is convinced that it is sinful to say what he knows and also that it is sinful for the uninitiated to hear it. Plutarch speaks of the terror of those about to be initiated, comparing their state of mind to a preparation for death. Initiation had to be preceded by a special mode of life. This aimed at bringing sensuality under the control of the spirit. Fasting, solitary life, mortification and certain exercises of the soul served this purpose. The things to which man clings in ordinary life were to lose all value for him. The whole course of his experience and feeling had to take a different direction. — There can be no doubt about the meaning of such exercises and tests. The wisdom to be offered to the neophyte could produce the right effect upon his soul only if he had previously changed his lower world of experience. He was inducted into the life of the spirit. He was to behold a

higher world. He could find no relationship to this world without previous exercises and tests. Everything depended just on this relationship. Whoever wishes to understand these things correctly must have known by experience the intimate facts of the life of cognition. He must know by experience that two widely divergent relationships are possible in relation to what is offered by the highest cognition. — The world surrounding man is his *real* world at first. He feels, hears and sees its processes. Because he perceives them with his senses he calls them real and thinks about them in order to gain insight into their connections. — On the other hand, what rises in his soul is not real to him at first in the same sense. It is “mere” thoughts and ideas. At most, he sees in them *pictures* of material reality. They themselves have no reality. One cannot touch them; one cannot hear nor see them.

Another relationship to the world exists. A person who clings at all costs to the kind of reality described above, will hardly grasp it. It enters the lives of certain people at a certain moment. Their whole relationship to the world is reversed. They call truly real the images which arise in the spiritual life of their soul. They assign only a lower form of reality to what the senses hear, touch and see. They know they cannot

*prove* what they say. They know they can only *recount* their new experiences. And they know that in recounting them to others they are in the position of a man who can see and who imparts his visual impressions to one born blind. They undertake the communication of their inner experiences, trusting that they are surrounded by others, who, although their spiritual eye is still closed, have a logical understanding which can be strengthened through the power of what they hear. They believe in humanity and wish to open spiritual eyes. They can only offer the fruits their spirit itself has gathered; whether another sees the fruits depends upon whether he has comprehension for what is seen by a spiritual eye. — Something existing in man at first prevents him from seeing with the eyes of the spirit. First of all he is not here for this purpose. He is what his senses represent him to be, and his intellect is only the interpreter and judge of his senses. These senses would fulfill *their* mission badly if they did not insist upon the truth and infallibility of their evidence. From its own point of view, an eye must uphold the absolute reality of its perceptions, otherwise it would be a bad eye. The eye is quite right, so far as it goes. It is not deprived of its rights by the spiritual eye. This spiritual eye allows us to see what the material eye sees, but in a higher light. Nothing the material eye sees is denied. But a

new radiance, hitherto unseen, shines from it. Then we know that what we first saw was but a lower reality. We see this still, but it is immersed in something higher, in the spirit. Now it is a question of whether we experience and feel what we see. Whoever is able to bring *living* experience and feeling to the material world only, will regard the higher world as a Fata Morgana or as “mere” phantasy-images. His feelings are directed entirely toward the material world. When he tries to grasp spirit images, he seizes emptiness. When he gropes after them, they withdraw from him. They are “mere” thoughts. He thinks them; he does not live in them. They are pictures, less real to him than fleeting dreams. Compared with his reality they are like images made of froth which vanish as they encounter the massive, solidly-built reality of which his senses tell him. — It is a different matter for the person whose experience and feelings with regard to reality have changed. For him that reality has lost its absolute stability, its unquestioned value. His senses and his feelings need not become blunted. But they begin to doubt their absolute authority; they leave space for something else. The world of the spirit begins to animate this space.

At this point a dreadful possibility exists. A man may lose his experience and feeling of direct reality

without finding any new reality opening before him. He is then suspended in a void. He seems to himself dead. The old values have disappeared and no new ones have taken their place. The world and man no longer exist for him. — This is by no means a mere possibility. At some time or other it happens to everyone who wishes to attain higher cognition. He reaches a point where to him the spirit interprets all life as death. Then he is no longer in the world. He is beneath the world — in the nether world. He accomplishes the — journey to Hades. It is well for him if he is not submerged. It is well for him if a new world opens before him. Either he disappears, or is confronted by a new self. In the latter case a new sun and a new earth appear to him. Out of spiritual fire the whole world has been reborn for him.

Thus the initiates describe what happened to them through the Mysteries. Menippus relates that he journeyed to Babylon in order to be taken to Hades and brought back again by the successors of Zoroaster. He says that on his travels he swam across the great water and that he passed through fire and ice. We hear that the mystics were terrified by a drawn sword and that “blood flowed.” We understand such sayings when we know the point of transition from lower to higher cognition. We ourselves have felt how

all solid matter, all the material world, has dissolved into water; we have lost the ground from beneath our feet. Everything we had previously experienced as living has been killed. The spirit has passed through material life as a sword pierces a warm body; we have seen the blood of sensuality flow.

But a new life has appeared. We have climbed up from the nether world. The orator Aristides relates, “I thought I touched the god and felt him draw near, and I was then between waking and sleeping. My spirit was so light that one who is not ‘initiated’ cannot speak of it nor understand it.” This new existence is not subject to the laws of lower life. Growth and decay do not affect it. Much may be said about the eternal, but one’s words will be “but sound and smoke,” who does not speak of the same thing as those who speak of it after the journey to Hades. The initiates have a new conception of life and death. Now for the first time they are entitled to speak about immortality. They know that whoever speaks of immortality without the knowledge gained through initiation does not understand it. The uninitiated attribute immortality only to something which is subject to the laws of growth and decay. — The mystics did not desire to gain the mere *conviction* that the kernel of life is immortal. In their view, such a conviction would be

worthless. This is because they believed the non-mystic simply does not have the eternal living within him. If he were to speak of the eternal, he would speak of nothing. The mystics seek the eternal itself. They must first awaken the eternal within themselves; then they can speak of it. Therefore Plato's severe saying has full reality for them: Whoever is not initiated is submerged in the mire, and he alone enters eternity who has experienced mystical life. Only in this way can the words in the fragment from Sophocles be understood:

"Thrice happy they, who, having seen these rites,  
Then pass to Hades: there to these alone  
Is granted *life*, all others evil find."

Are not *dangers* described in speaking of the Mysteries? Is it not robbing men of happiness, of the most valuable part of life, to lead them to the gate of the nether world? Terrible is the responsibility incurred by such an act. And yet, may we shirk this responsibility? These were the questions the initiate had to ask himself. In his opinion his knowledge was to the soul of the people as light is to darkness. But in this darkness dwells innocent happiness. The mystics were of the opinion that this happiness should not be interfered with wantonly. For what would have happened in the first place had the mystic "betrayed"

his secret? He would have spoken words, nothing but words. Nothing at all would have happened through the experiences and feelings, which should have evoked the spirit from these words. For this, preparation, exercises, tests and the complete change of sense-experience would have been necessary. Without these, the hearer would have been flung into emptiness, into nothingness. He would have been deprived of what gave him happiness without being able to receive anything in exchange. It might be said that one could not have taken anything from him. For certainly mere words could not change his life of experience. He could only have *experienced* reality through the objects of his senses. One could have given him nothing but a dreadful, life-destroying *apprehension*. This could be regarded only as a crime. The above is no longer fully valid today for the acquisition of spiritual cognition. The latter can be understood conceptually because modern man has a capacity to form concepts which the ancients lacked. Today people can be found who have cognition of the spiritual world through their own experience; they can be confronted by others who comprehend these experiences conceptually. Such a capacity for forming concepts was lacking in the ancients.



Ancient Mystery wisdom is like a hothouse plant which must be cherished and cared for in seclusion. To bring it into the atmosphere of everyday conceptions is to put it in an element in which it cannot flourish. It withers away to nothing before the caustic verdict of modern science and logic. Let us therefore divest ourselves for a time of all the education we have received through the microscope, telescope and the ways of thought derived from natural science; let us purify our hands which have become clumsy and have been too busy dissecting and experimenting, so that we may enter the pure temple of the Mysteries. For this a truly unprejudiced mind is necessary.

For the mystic, everything depends primarily upon the frame of mind in which he approaches what he feels to be the highest, the answers to the enigmas of existence. Particularly in our time, when only things pertaining to physical science are recognized as deserving cognition, it is difficult to believe that for the highest things, everything depends on a frame of mind. Cognition thereby becomes an intimate concern of each personality. For the mystic, however, it is so. Tell someone the solution of the world-enigma! Hand it to him ready-made! The mystic will consider it nothing but empty sound if the individual does not confront this solution in the right manner. The solution is

nothing in itself; it disintegrates if it does not kindle in his feeling the particular fire which is essential. Let a divine being approach you! It may be nothing or everything. Nothing, if you meet it in the frame of mind in which you confront everyday things.

Everything, if you are prepared and attuned to it.

What it is in itself is a matter which does not concern you; the point is whether it leaves you as you were or makes a different man of you. But this depends solely on you. You must have been prepared by the education and development of the most intimate forces of your personality so that what the divine is able to evoke may be kindled and released in you.

What is brought to you depends upon the reception you prepare for it. Plutarch has given an account of this education; he has spoken of the greeting the mystic offers the divine being who approaches him: "For the god addresses each one of us as we approach him here with the words 'Know Thyself,' as a form of welcome, which certainly is in no wise of less import than 'Hail;' and we in turn reply to him 'Thou art,' as rendering unto him a form of address which is truthful, free from deception and the only one befitting him alone, the assertion of *Being*. — The fact is that we really have no share in Being, but everything of a mortal nature is at some stage between coming into existence and passing away, and presents only a dim

and uncertain semblance and appearance of itself; and if you apply the whole force of your mind in your desire to apprehend it, it is like unto the violent grasping of water, which, by squeezing and compression, loses the handful enclosed, as it spurts through the fingers; even so Reason, pursuing the exceedingly clear appearance of every one of those things that are susceptible to modification and change, is baffled by the one aspect of its coming into being, and by the other of its passing away; and thus it is unable to apprehend a single thing that is abiding or really existent. 'It is impossible to step twice in the same river' are the words of Heraclitus, nor is it possible to lay hold twice of any mortal substance in a permanent state; by the suddenness and swiftness of the change in it there 'comes dispersion and, at another time, a gathering together;' or, rather, not at another time nor later, but at the same instant it both settles into its place and forsakes its place; 'it is coming and going.' Wherefore that which is born of it never attains unto being because of the unceasing and unstaying process of generation, which, ever bringing change, produces from the seed an embryo, then a babe, then a child and in due course a boy, a young man, a mature man, an elderly man, an old man, causing the first generations and ages to pass away by those which succeed them. But we have a

ridiculous fear of one death, we who have already died so many deaths, and still are dying! For not only is it true, as Heraclitus used to say, that the death of fire is birth for air, and the death of air is birth for water, but the case is even more clearly to be seen in our own selves: the man in his prime passes away when the old man comes into existence, the young man passes away into the man in his prime, the child into the young man, and the babe into the child. Dead is the man of yesterday, for he is passed into the man of to-day; and the man of to-day is dying as he passes into the man of to-morrow. Nobody remains one person, nor is one person; but we become many persons, even as matter is drawn about some one semblance and common mold with imperceptible movement. Else how is it that, if we remain the same persons, we take delight in some things now, whereas earlier we took delight in different things; that we love or hate opposite things, and so too with our admirations and our disapprovals, and that we use other words and feel other emotions and have no longer the same personal appearance, the same external form, nor the same purposes in mind? For without change it is not reasonable that a person should have different experiences and emotions; and if he changes, he is not the same person, he has no permanent being, but changes his very nature as one personality in him

succeeds to another. Our senses, through ignorance of reality, falsely tell us that what appears to be is.”

Plutarch often shows himself to be an initiate. What he portrays for us here is an essential condition of the life of a mystic. Man acquires a wisdom by means of which his spirit sees through the illusory character of material life. Everything the material nature regards as existence, as reality, is plunged into the stream of evolving life. And man himself fares the same as the other things of the world. He disintegrates before the eyes of his spirit; his totality is dissolved into parts, into transitory phenomena. Birth and death lose their distinctive significance; they become moments of coming into existence, and decay like everything else which happens. The highest cannot be found in connection with growth and decay. It can only be sought in something truly lasting, which looks back to what has been and forward to what is to come. To find what looks backward and forward is a higher stage of cognition. It is the spirit, which is revealed in and through the material world. This spirit has nothing to do with material growth. It does not come into existence nor decay in the same manner as do sense phenomena. Whoever lives only in the world of the senses has this spirit latent within him; whoever sees through the illusory character of the world of the

senses has it as a revealed reality within him. Whoever achieves this insight has developed a new organ within him. Something has taken place in him, as in a plant which at first has only green leaves and then puts forth a colored blossom. Certainly, the forces through which the flower developed were already latent in the plant before the blossom came into existence, but they became reality only when this latter took place. Divine spiritual forces also are latent in the purely material man, but they are a revealed reality only in the mystic. Therein lies the transformation that has taken place in the mystic. By his development he has added something new to the existing world. The material world has made a material man of him and then left him to himself. Nature has fulfilled her mission. Her potential connection with the forces working within man is exhausted. But these forces themselves are not yet exhausted. They lie as though spellbound in the purely natural man, awaiting their release. They cannot release themselves; they vanish into nothing if man himself does not grasp them and develop them further, if he does not awaken to real existence what slumbers hidden within him. — Nature evolves from the least to the most perfect. Nature leads beings by an extensive series of stages from the inanimate through all forms of life up to material man. Man in his material nature opens his

eyes and becomes aware of himself in the material world as a real being, capable of transforming itself. He still observes in himself the forces out of which this material nature is born. These forces are not the object of transformation because they gave rise to the transformation. Man bears them within himself as an indication that something lives within him, transcending his material perception. What may come into existence through these forces is not yet present. Man feels something light up within him which has created everything, including himself; and he feels that this something will spur him to higher achievement. It is within him; it existed before his material appearance, and will be there after it. Through it he has come into being, and he may grasp it, and himself participate in his creation. Such feelings lived in the ancient mystic after initiation. He felt the eternal, the divine. His deeds will become a part of the creative activity of the divine. He may say to himself: I have discovered a higher " I " within me, but this " I " surpasses the boundaries of my material growth; it existed before my birth, it will exist after my death. Creatively this " I " has worked throughout eternity; creatively it will work in eternity. My material personality is a creation of this " I ." But it has incorporated me within it; creatively it works in me; I am a part of it. What I am now able to create is

something higher than the material. My personality is only a medium for this creative force, for this divine, within me. In this way the mystic experienced his apotheosis.

The mystic named the force thus kindled within him, his true spirit. He was the result of this spirit. It seemed to him as though a new being had entered him and taken possession of his organs. This was a being which stood between his material personality and the Sovereign Power of the cosmos, the Godhead. The mystic sought his true spirit. He said to himself, I have become man in the great natural world. But nature has not completed her task. I myself must take over this completion. However, I cannot do this in the gross realm of nature to which my material personality also belongs. Whatever can develop in this realm has developed. Therefore I must escape from this realm. I must continue to build in the sphere of the spiritual, where nature has stood still. I must create for myself a breathing space which cannot be found in outer nature. This breathing space was prepared for the mystics in the Mystery temples. There the forces slumbering within them were awakened; there they were transformed into higher creative spirit-natures. This transformation was a delicate process. It could not endure the rough elements of the outdoors. When



the process was completed, through it man had become a rock grounded in the eternal, able to defy all storms. But he was not permitted to believe that he could communicate his experiences in their direct form to others.

Plutarch informs us that in the Mysteries “it is possible to gain the clearest reflections and adumbrations of the truth about the daemons.” And from Cicero we learn that “those occult Mysteries ... when interpreted and explained prove to have more to do with natural science than with theology.” From such communications we see clearly that for the mystic there existed a higher insight into natural science than the religion of the people could give. Moreover this shows that the daemons, that is, the spiritual beings, and the gods themselves required explanation. Beings are approached who are of a higher nature than the daemons and gods. And this is in the nature of Mystery wisdom. The people pictured gods and daemons in images taken entirely from the world of material reality. Surely one who could penetrate the essence of the eternal was bound to lose confidence in the eternalness of such gods! How could Zeus, as the people pictured him, be eternal when he had the characteristics of a mortal being? — One thing was clear to the mystic: man attains his idea of the

gods in a different manner from his ideas about other things. An object in the external world compels me to form a definitive idea of it. In contrast to this the formation of ideas of the gods has something free, even arbitrary, about it. The compulsion of the external world is lacking. Reflection teaches us that with the gods we imagine something for which there is no external control. This puts man into a state of logical uncertainty. He begins to feel that he is the creator of his gods. He even asks himself: How do I come to transcend physical reality in my world of ideas? The mystic must devote himself to such thoughts. The doubts which then beset him were justified. He could think to himself: Let us simply look at all these ideas of the gods. Are they not similar to the creatures we meet in the world of the senses? Has not man created them by mentally adding or subtracting this or that quality essentially belonging to the world of the senses? The barbarian who loves hunting creates a heaven for himself in which the most glorious hunts of the gods take place. The Greek peoples Olympus with divinities having their prototype in the reality which is well known to him.

The philosopher Xenophanes (575–480 B.C.) referred to this fact with crude logic. We know that the older Greek philosophers were absolutely dependent

on Mystery wisdom. This will be demonstrated in relation to Heraclitus in particular. For this reason the saying of Xenophanes can be accepted without reservation as a conviction based on mystic knowledge. He says:

“But men have the idea that gods are born,  
And wear their clothes, and have both voice and shape.  
But had the oxen or the lions hands,  
Or could with hands depict a work like men,  
Were beasts to draw the semblance of the gods,  
The horses would them like to horses sketch,  
To oxen, oxen, and their bodies make  
Of such a shape as to themselves belongs.”

Through such insight man may become doubtful of everything divine. He may reject the legends of the gods and acknowledge as reality only that which his material perceptions compel him to acknowledge. But the mystic did not become such a doubter. He understood that the doubter was like a plant which said to itself: My colored blossom is vain and worthless, for I am complete in my green leaves; what I add to them only increases the illusory appearance. But neither could the mystic remain content with the gods thus created, the gods of the people. If the plant could think, it would understand that the forces which had created the green leaves are also destined to

create the colored blossom. And it would not rest until it had investigated these forces for itself in order to see them. So it was for the mystic in relation to the gods of the people. He did not deny them nor declare them to be vain, but he knew that they were created by man. The same natural forces, the same divine elements which work creatively in nature also work creatively in the mystic. In him also they engender ideas of the gods. He wishes to see this force which is creating gods. It is not like the gods of the people; it is something higher. Xenophanes also indicates this:

One God there is, 'midst gods and men supreme;  
In form, in mind, unlike to mortal men.

This God was also the God of the Mysteries. He could be called "a hidden God," for nowhere — so it was thought — is He to be found by the purely material man. Direct your gaze outward toward objects; you find no divinity. Exert your intelligence; you may understand the laws by which things come into existence and decay, but your intellect shows you nothing divine. Saturate your fantasy with religious feeling; you can create pictures of beings which you may take to be gods, but your intellect dissects them for you, for it proves to you that you yourself created them, and borrowed the material for their creation from the material world. Insofar as you, as intellectual

man, consider the things about you, you must deny the gods. For God is not there for your senses or intellect, which explain material perceptions. God is magically concealed in the world. And you need His own force in order to find Him. This force you must awaken within yourself. These are the teachings which a neophyte of ancient times received. Then began for him the great cosmic drama in which he was engulfed alive. This drama consisted of nothing less than the release of the spellbound God. Where is God? This was the question the mystic put before his soul. God is not, but nature is. He must be found in nature. In nature He has found an enchanted tomb. The words, "God is Love," are grasped by the mystic in a higher sense. For God has carried this Love to its uttermost. He has given Himself in infinite Love; He has diffused Himself; He has divided Himself into the manifold variety of natural things; they live, and He does not live in them. He rests in them. He lives in man. And man can experience the life of God in himself. If he is to let Him come to cognition he must release this cognition creatively in himself. — Man now gazes into himself. As a hidden creative force, as yet unincarnated, works the divinity in his soul. In this soul is a place where the spellbound divinity can come to life again. The soul is the mother who by nature can conceive the divinity. If the soul is fructified by nature it will give birth to a

divinity. Out of the marriage of the soul with nature a divinity will be born. This is no longer a “hidden” divinity; it is revealed. It has life, perceptible life, and walks among men. It is the released spirit in man, the offspring of the spellbound divinity. It is not the great God, who was, is and will be, but it can be taken as His revelation in a certain sense. The *Father* rests in concealment, the *Son* is born to man out of his own soul. Thus mystic cognition is a real event in the cosmic process. It is the birth of an offspring of God. It is an event as real as any other natural event, only on a higher level. This is the great secret of the mystic, that he himself creatively releases his divine offspring, but he also prepares himself beforehand to acknowledge this divine offspring created by himself. The non-mystic lacks the experience of the father of this offspring. For this father slumbers under a spell. The offspring appears to be virginally born. The soul appears to have borne him without fructification. All its other offspring are conceived by the material world. In their case the father can be seen and touched. He has material life. The divine offspring alone is conceived of the eternal, hidden Father — God Himself.

## **Greek Sages before Plato in the Light of Mystery Wisdom**

NUMEROUS FACTS lead us to perceive that the philosophical wisdom of the Greeks stems from the same basic conviction as does mystical cognition. We can understand the great philosophers only when we approach them with the feelings gained from observation of the Mysteries. How reverently Plato speaks of the “secret teachings” in the *Phaedo*: “And it appears that those men who established the Mysteries were not unenlightened, but in reality had a hidden meaning when they said long ago that whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in the mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will dwell with the gods. For as they say in the Mysteries, ‘the thyrsus-bearers are many, but the mystics few;’ and these mystics are, I believe, those who have been *true* philosophers. And I in my life have, so far as I could, left nothing undone, and have striven in every way to make myself one of them.” — Initiation can be discussed in this way only by someone who has placed his own striving for wisdom entirely at the service of the conviction engendered by initiation. And there is no doubt that a bright light

is cast upon the words of the great Greek philosophers when they are illuminated by the Mysteries.

A saying which has been handed down about Heraclitus of Ephesus (535–475 B.C.) gives a clear indication of his relationship to the essence of the Mysteries, saying that his thoughts are “a path which is difficult to travel,” that anyone who approaches them uninitiated will find only “obscurity and darkness,” but that on the other hand they are “brighter than sunlight” for the person who is introduced to them by a mystic. When it is said of his book that he placed the latter in the temple of Artemis, this means that he could be understood only by initiates. (Historical evidence of Heraclitus’ relationship to the Mysteries has already been contributed by Edmund Pfeiderer. See his book, *Die Philosophie des Heraklit von Ephesus im Lichte der Mysterienidee*, Berlin 1886.) Heraclitus was called “The Obscure” because only the light of the Mysteries provided the key to his conceptions.

Heraclitus strikes us as a personality with the most serious attitude toward life. If we know how to conjure up his appearance, we see in his physiognomy that he bore within him the most intimate experiences of cognition which he knew could only be indicated, not



expressed, by words. From the soil of such a conviction sprang his famous saying, "Everything is in a state of flux," which Plutarch interprets in the following words: "It is impossible to step twice in the same river nor is it possible to lay hold twice of any mortal substance in a permanent state, by the suddenness and swiftness of the change in it there comes dispersion and at another time, a gathering together; or rather, not at another time nor later, but at the same instant it both settles into its place and forsakes its place; it is coming and going." The man who thinks in this way has seen through the nature of transitory things. He has felt urged to characterize in the sharpest words the essence of transitoriness. Such a characterization cannot be made unless the transitory is measured against the eternal. In particular this characterization cannot be extended to man unless his innermost being has been penetrated. Heraclitus does extend this characterization to man: "Living and dead are the same and so are waking and sleeping, youth and age. For the one in changing becomes the other, and the other, changing, again becomes the one." Full cognition of the illusory character of the lower personality is expressed in this sentence. He speaks of this even more forcibly: "There is life and death in our life, just as in our death." What does this mean except that life can be valued more highly than death only

when seen from the point of view of the transitory. Death is decay to make room for new life, but the eternal lives in the new life as in the old. The same eternal appears in transitory life as in death. When man has grasped this eternal he looks upon death with the same feelings as he looks upon life. Only if he is unable to awaken this eternal within himself does life have a special value for him. The sentence, "Everything is in a state of flux" may be trotted out a thousand times, but if it is not spoken with a feeling for this content it is void of meaning. Cognition of eternal creation is valueless if it does not cancel out our dependence upon earthly creation. Heraclitus means to repudiate the lust for life which presses after transitory things with the saying, "How shall we say of our daily life: 'we are,' when we know that from the standpoint of the eternal: 'we are and we are not.'" (Heraclitus, *Fragment* No. 81) "But Hades is the same as Dionysus," states another of the *Fragments* of Heraclitus. Dionysus, the god of lust for life, of germination and growth, to whom the Dionysian festivals were dedicated, is for Heraclitus the same as Hades, the god of annihilation and destruction. Only one who sees life within death and death within life, and in both the eternal which is infinitely above life and death, his gaze alone can behold in the right light the disadvantages and advantages of existence. Then

the disadvantages find their justification, for the eternal lives in them also. What they appear to be from the standpoint of the limited lower life is only illusory: "For men to get all they wish is not the better thing. It is disease that makes health a pleasant thing; evil, good; hunger, surfeit; and toil, rest." "Sea water is the most pure and the most polluted; for fishes it is drinkable and salutary, but for men it is undrinkable and deleterious." Heraclitus intends primarily to point out not the transitory quality of earthly things, but the splendor and majesty of the eternal. — Heraclitus spoke vigorously against Homer, Hesiod and the scholars of his day. He wished to point out the manner of their thought which clings only to the transitory. He did not want the gods furnished with attributes taken from the transitory world. And he could not respect as the highest a science which investigated the laws of the growth and decay of things. — For him the eternal speaks through the transitory. He has a deeply significant symbol for this eternal: "The harmony of the world is of opposite tensions, as is that of the lyre or bow." How much is contained in this pictured Unity is attained by the striving of forces in opposite directions and the harmonization of these diverging forces. One tone contradicts another, yet together they achieve harmony. If we apply this to the spiritual world we have the thought of Heraclitus: "Immortals

take on mortality, mortals immortality; death is the eternal life of mortals, earthly life the death of immortals.”

To cling to the transitory with his cognition is the *original fault* of man. Thereby he turns away from the eternal. Through this, life becomes a danger to him. What happens to him comes to pass through life. But it loses its sting when he no longer values life as absolute. Then his innocence is restored to him. It is as though he could return from the so-called seriousness of life to childhood. How much that is play to the child is taken in all seriousness by the adult! The one who knows, however, becomes like a child. “Serious” values lose their worth when seen from the standpoint of the eternal. Life then appears as a *game*. Therefore Heraclitus says, “Eternity is a child at play; it is the dominion of a child.” Where does the original fault lie? It consists in taking with the utmost seriousness those things to which this seriousness should not be attached. God has descended into the world of things. Whoever receives these things without God receives them seriously as the “Tombs of God.” He should play with them like a child and employ his seriousness to draw out of them the God who sleeps spellbound within.

Burning, yes, scorching is the effect which contemplation of the eternal has upon ordinary *assumptions* about things. The spirit dissolves the thoughts of sensuality; it melts them. It is a consuming fire. This is the higher sense of the thought of Heraclitus, that fire is the archetypal substance of all things. Certainly this thought is to be taken first in the sense of an ordinary physical exploration of the phenomena of the world. But no one understands Heraclitus who does not think about him in the way that Philo, who lived at the time of the birth of Christianity, thought about the laws of the Bible. He says, "There are people who take written laws *only* as pictures of spiritual teaching. They search out the latter with great care and despise the former. I can only censure such people for they should take care of *both*: the cognition of the esoteric sense and the observation of the exoteric." — We pervert the thoughts of Heraclitus if we argue whether by his concept of fire he meant physical fire, or whether for him fire was only a symbol of the eternal spirit which dissolves and reforms material things. He meant both and neither, because for him the spirit also lived in ordinary fire. The force physically active in fire lives on a higher plane in the human soul, melting sense-bound cognition in its furnace and allowing contemplation of the eternal to emerge from it.

Heraclitus in particular may easily be misunderstood. He allows strife to be the father of things, but to him it is the father only of "things," not of the eternal. If there were no polarities in the world, if the most manifold conflicting interests did not exist, the world of growth would not exist, nor would the world of decay. What reveals itself, however, in this, what is diffused in it, is not strife; it is harmony. Just because strife is in all things, the spirit of the sage is to move over all things like fire, transforming them into harmony. This point throws light on one of the great thoughts of Heraclitean wisdom. What is the personal essence of man? The above passage contains the answer of Heraclitus. Man is a mixture of conflicting elements, into which God is descended. This is the condition in which he finds himself. Further, he becomes aware of the spirit within him, the spirit which is rooted in the eternal. This spirit, however, is born for him personally out of the conflict of the elements. This spirit should also pacify the elements. In man, nature creates beyond herself. It is the same unique force which has begotten the conflict, the mixture, which, filled with wisdom, is to remove this conflict again. There we have the eternal duality which lives in man, the eternal contradiction in him between temporal and eternal. Through the eternal he has become something quite definite, and out of this

he should create something higher. He is both dependent and independent. He can participate in the eternal spirit which he beholds only to the extent of the mixture the eternal spirit has produced in him. Just because of this he is called upon to form the eternal out of the temporal. The spirit works in him. But it works in him in a special way. It works out of the temporal. It is the peculiarity of the human soul that something temporal works like something eternal, that it leavens and strengthens like an eternal quality. This makes the human soul similar to a god and a worm at the same time. Because of this man stands midway between God and animal. This leavening and strengthening force in him is his daemonic element. This is what strives beyond him from within. Heraclitus points to this in a striking way: "Man's daemon is his destiny." (Daemon is meant here in the Greek sense. In the modern sense we would say spirit.) Thus for Heraclitus what lives in man extends itself far beyond the personal. This personal element is the bearer of a daemonic element. This element is not confined to one personality and the death and birth of the personality have no significance for it. What connection has this daemonic element with what in the form of personality comes into existence and decays? The personal element is only a form of appearance for the daemonic. The bearer of such cognition looks forward

and backward beyond himself. That he experiences the daemonic element in himself is to him evidence of his own immortality. Now he may no longer ascribe to this daemonic element the single task of filling out his personality. For the personality can be only *one* form of appearance of the daemonic element. The daemon *cannot* confine itself within *one* personality. It has the force to animate many personalities. It can go from personality to personality. This premise of Heraclitus gives rise as a matter of course to the great thought of reincarnation. Not, however, to the thought alone, but to the *experience* of reincarnation. The thought is only the preparation for the experience. Whoever becomes aware of the daemonic element within himself does not discover it to be an innocent primary element. He finds that it has characteristics. How has it come by these? Why have I tendencies? Because other personalities have already worked upon my daemon. And what will become of the effect which I produce on the daemon, if I may not assume that its task is exhausted in my personality? I prepare for a later personality. Something which is not the same as a divinity, something which reaches beyond me, introduces itself between me and the cosmic unity. My daemon introduces itself. As my today is but the result of yesterday, and my tomorrow will only be the result of my today, so my life is the continuation of another,



and will be the basis for another. As physical man looks backward on numerous yesterdays and forward to numerous tomorrows, so the soul of the sage beholds numerous lives in the past and numerous lives in the future. What I acquired yesterday in the way of thoughts and accomplishments, I use today. Is it not so with life? Do not men set foot upon the horizon of existence with the most varied faculties? Whence comes this variety? Does it come out of nothingness? — Our natural science congratulates itself on banishing the miracle from our conceptions of organic life. David Friedrich Strauss (see *Alter und Neuer Glaube*, Old and New Faith) considers it a great achievement of modern times that we no longer think of a perfect organic creature being miraculously created out of nothingness. We grasp perfection when we are able to explain it as an evolution out of imperfection. The structure of the ape is no longer a miracle if we may assume, as ancestors of the ape, primitive fish which have gradually transformed themselves. Let us agree to accept for the spirit what seems to us right with regard to nature. Is the perfected spirit to have the same origin as the imperfected spirit? Is Goethe to have the same disposition as any Hottentot? The spirit of Goethe cannot have the same spiritual predispositions as an aborigine, any more than a fish has the same

predisposition as an ape. The spiritual ancestry of Goethe's spirit is different from that of the aborigine. The spirit has *grown* like the body. The spirit in Goethe has more predecessors than that in the aborigine. Let us take the teaching of reincarnation in this sense. Then we shall no longer find it "unscientific." On the contrary, what is found in the soul will then be explained in the right way. What is given will not be accepted as a miracle. That I can write is the result of the fact that I have learned to do so. One who has never held a pen in his hand cannot sit down and write. But someone or other is supposed to have a "spark of genius" in some purely miraculous way. No, this "spark of genius" must also be acquired; it must be learned. If it makes its appearance in a personality, we call it a spiritual element. But first this spiritual element also had to learn; in an earlier life it has acquired for itself the "ability" it has in a later one.

In this way and *no* other did Heraclitus and the Greek sages conceive the thought of eternity. For them there was no question of the continuance of the actual personality. Let us refer to a saying of Empedocles (490–430 B.C.). Of those who regard something as a miracle, he says,

“Fools! for they have no far-reaching thoughts —  
Who deem that what before was not comes into being,  
Or that aught can perish and be utterly destroyed.  
For it cannot be that aught can arise from what in no  
way is,  
And it is impossible and unheard of that what is should  
perish;  
For it will always *be*, wherever one may keep putting it.  
A man wise in such matters would never surmise in his  
heart  
That as long as mortals live what they call their life,  
So long they are, and suffer good and ill;  
While before they were formed and after they have been  
dissolved  
They are just nothing at all.”

The Greek sage did not raise the question whether there is an eternal element in man; he only asked of what does this eternal consist and how can man cherish and care for it within himself. For it was clear to him from the beginning that man lives as a creature midway between the earthly and the divine. There was no question of the divine existing outside and beyond earthly things. The divine lives in man; it lives there, but in a human way. It is the force which urges man to make himself ever more and more divine. Only a person who thinks in this way can say with Empedocles,

When, released from the body, you ascend to the free ether,

You will become an immortal god, escaping death. —

What can happen to a human life from such a point of view? It can be initiated into the ordered cycle of the eternal. Forces must be present in it which are not brought into development by a purely natural life. And this life could pass by unused if these forces remained lying fallow. It was the task of the Mysteries to open them up, thereby likening the human to the divine. And the Greek sages also set themselves this task. Thus we understand Plato's words: "Whoever goes uninitiated and unsanctified to the other world will lie in the mire, but he who arrives there initiated and purified will dwell with the gods." Here we are dealing with an idea of immortality, the significance of which is determined *within* the whole cosmos. Everything man undertakes in order to awaken the eternal within himself he does in order to heighten the existence-value of the cosmos. As a cognizant being one is not an idle observer of the whole cosmos when he pictures to himself what would equally well be there without him. His power of cognition is a higher natural creative force. What lights up in him spiritually is a divinity which was spellbound before, and which without his cognition would have to lie fallow and wait for another deliverer. Therefore the human personality does not

live within itself and for itself; it lives for the cosmos. Life extends far beyond individual existence when it is regarded in this way. Within the framework of such a conception we can understand sentences such as the following by Pindar, which gives us a glimpse of the eternal: "Happy is he who has seen those Mysteries ere he passes beneath the earth. He knows the truth about life's ending, and he knows that its first seeds were of God's giving."

The proud physiognomy and solitary manner of sages like Heraclitus are understandable. They could say proudly of themselves that much was revealed to them, for they did not ascribe their knowledge to their transitory personality at all, but to the eternal daemon within them. Their pride was of necessity stamped with the attributes of humility and modesty, which are expressed in the words: All knowledge of transitory things is in eternal flux like these transitory things themselves. Heraclitus calls the eternal cosmos a game; he could also call it the most profoundly serious thing. But the word serious has become worn out through being applied to earthly experiences. The game of the eternal grants man a security in life of which he is deprived by the seriousness arising out of the transitory.

Another form of world-conception, different from that of Heraclitus, grew from the same foundation in the essence of the Mysteries, within a community founded by Pythagoras in lower Italy in the sixth century before Christ. The Pythagoreans saw the foundation of things in numbers and figures, whose laws they investigated mathematically. Aristotle says of them, "They were the first to advance the study of mathematics, and having been brought up in it they thought its principles were the principles of all things. Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they seemed to see many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being — more than in fire and earth and water, such and such a modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and reason, another being opportunity — and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible; since, again, they saw that the attributes and ratios of numerical scales were expressible in numbers; since, then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modeled after numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the demands of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number."

The mathematical-scientific observation of natural phenomena must always lead to a kind of Pythagorean conception. If a string of definite length is struck, a certain tone is sent forth. If the string is shortened in definite numerical relationships, other tones come into being. The pitch of these tones can be expressed by *numerical* relationships. In physics color relationships also are expressed by numbers. When two bodies combine to form one substance this always occurs in such a way that of one substance one quite definite mass, expressible by number, combines with an appropriate one of the other substance. The Pythagoreans directed their observation upon such arrangements of measure and number in nature. Geometric figures also play a similar part in nature. For instance, astronomy is mathematics applied to the heavenly bodies. The point which became important to the thinking life of the Pythagoreans is the fact that man discovers the laws of numbers and figures entirely by himself, through his spiritual activity alone, and that when he looks out into nature the objects follow these laws he has established for himself in his soul. Man formulates for himself the concept of the ellipse; he establishes the laws of the ellipse. And the heavenly bodies move according to the laws he has established. (Of course we are not concerned here with the astronomical conceptions of the

Pythagoreans. What could be said of them also applies to the Copernican conceptions in the connection under consideration here.) From this it follows immediately that the functions of the human soul are not a force apart from the rest of the cosmos, but that these functions are the expression of a law-abiding pattern which is interwoven with the cosmos. The Pythagorean said to himself: The senses show material phenomena to man. But they do not show the harmonious patterns which the objects obey. Rather, the spirit of man must first find these harmonious patterns within himself if he wishes to behold them outside in the cosmos. The deeper sense of the cosmos, that which reigns in it as eternal law-abiding necessity, becomes apparent as a present reality in the human soul. In the soul *the meaning of the cosmos dawns*. This meaning does not lie in what is seen, heard and touched, but in what the soul brings forth from its deep recesses into the light of day. The eternal pattern therefore lies hidden in the depths of the soul. Let us descend into the soul, and we shall find the eternal. God, the eternal cosmic harmony, is within the human soul. The soul is not confined to the physical body enclosed by man's skin. For in the soul are born the patterns according to which the worlds circle in space. The soul is not in the personality. The personality merely provides the organ through which



what is interwoven with the cosmos can be expressed. Something of the spirit of Pythagoras is contained in the saying of the Church Father, Gregory of Nyssa: "It is said that human nature by itself is something small and limited, but the Godhead is infinite, and how has the infinite been embraced by something so tiny? And who says that the infinity of the Godhead was enclosed within the bounds of the flesh as in a vessel? For not even in our life is man's spiritual nature enclosed within the bounds of the flesh; on the contrary the physical body is limited by neighboring parts, but the soul expands freely over the whole of creation by means of the activity of thought." The soul is not the personality. The soul belongs to eternity. Taking this point of view, the Pythagorean also had to admit that only "fools" could suppose the qualities of the soul to be exhausted with the personality. — For them also it depended upon the awakening of the eternal within the personal. To them cognition was communion with the eternal. The more a man brought this eternal into existence within himself the higher they valued him. The life of their community consisted in fostering this communion with the eternal. In order to lead the members of the community to such communion, the Pythagorean education was established. This education, therefore, was a philosophical initiation. And the Pythagoreans could

very well say that by their mode of life they strove toward the same goal as the Mystery cults.

## **Plato as a Mystic**

THE SIGNIFICANCE of the Mysteries in the spiritual life of Greece can be seen in Plato's conception of the world. There is only one means of understanding him fully: he must be placed in the light which shines forth from the Mysteries. The later pupils of Plato, the Neoplatonists, attribute to him a secret teaching, to which he admitted only those who were worthy, and then strictly under the "seal of silence." His teaching was considered secret in the same sense as the Mystery wisdom. Even if Plato himself is not the author of the seventh Platonic Epistle, as some people assert, this makes no difference for our purpose; it need not concern us whether Plato or someone else expresses the attitude of mind contained in this letter. This attitude of mind was inherent in his conception of the world. It says in this Epistle: "But this much I can certainly declare concerning all these writers, or prospective writers who claim to know the subjects which I seriously study, whether as hearers of mine or of other teachers, or from their own discoveries; it is impossible, in my judgment at least, that these men understand anything about this subject. There does not exist, nor will there ever exist, any treatise of mine dealing therewith, for it does not at all admit of verbal

expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth in the soul on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself.” — These words could only indicate a powerlessness in the use of words due to personal weakness, if one could not find in them the sense contained in the Mysteries. What Plato never wrote and never intended to write about must be something that defies expression in writing. It must be a feeling, a sensation, an experience that cannot be conveyed in a moment, but is attained through “continued application ... and communion.” The intimate training Plato was able to give to the elect is indicated here. For them fire flashed forth from his words; for the others, only thoughts. — It is of great consequence how one approaches Plato’s *Dialogues*. They mean more or less according to one’s frame of mind. To Plato’s pupils more than the mere literal sense of his expositions was conveyed. Where he taught, the participants experienced the atmosphere of the Mysteries. The words had overtones which vibrated with them. But these overtones needed the atmosphere of the Mysteries. Otherwise they died away unheard.

In the center of the world of Plato's *Dialogues* stands the personality of Socrates. We need not touch on the historical aspect here. What matters is the character of Socrates as represented by Plato. Socrates is a person sanctified through death for the cause of truth. He died as only an initiate can die, one to whom death is but a moment of life like other moments. He meets death as any other occurrence of earthly existence. His behavior was such that not even in his friends were the feelings usual to such an occasion aroused. Phaedo says in the *Dialogue on the Immortality of the Soul*: "For my part, I had strange emotions when I was there. For I was not filled with pity as I might naturally be when present at the death of a friend; since he seemed to me to be happy, both in his bearing and his words, he was meeting death so fearlessly and nobly. And so I thought that even in going to the abode of the dead he was not going without the protection of the gods, and that when he arrived there it would be well with him, if it ever was well with anyone. And for this reason I was not at all filled with pity, as might seem natural when I was present at a scene of mourning; nor on the other hand did I feel pleasure, as was our custom when we were occupied with philosophy — although our talk was of philosophy — but a very strange feeling came over me, an unaccustomed mixture of pleasure and of pain

together, when I thought that Socrates was presently to die.” And the dying Socrates instructs his pupils about immortality. His personality, knowing by experience the valuelessness of life, here acts as proof of a quality very different from all logic and intellectual reasoning. It is not as though a man were conversing — for this man is at the point of crossing the threshold of death — but as though the eternal truth itself which had made its abode in a transitory personality, were speaking. Where the temporal dissolves into nothingness we seem to find the air in which the eternal can resound.

We hear no proofs of immortality in the logical sense. The whole dialogue is directed toward leading the friends to the point where they can behold the eternal. Then they will need no proofs. Is one to prove that the rose is red to someone who sees it? Is one to prove that the spirit is eternal to someone whose eyes have been opened so that he can see this spirit? — Socrates indicates living experiences. First of all it is a meeting with wisdom itself. What is the aim of the person who pursues wisdom? He wishes to free himself from all that his senses offer him in everyday observation. He wishes to seek the spirit in the material world. Is not this a fact which can be compared to dying? “Other people” — this is Socrates’

opinion — “are likely not to be aware that those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead. Now if this is true, it would be absurd to be eager for nothing but this all their lives, and then to be reluctant when that came for which they had been eagerly practicing all along.” To reinforce this, Socrates asks one of his friends, “Do you think a philosopher would be likely to care much about the so-called pleasures, such as eating or drinking? ... Or about the pleasures of sexual desire? ... Do you believe such a man would think much of the other cares of the body — I mean such as the possession of fine clothes and shoes and the other personal adornments? Do you think he would care about them or despise them, except so far as it is necessary to have them? ... Altogether, then, you think that such a man would not devote himself to the body, but would, so far as he was able, turn away from the body and concern himself with the soul? ... To begin with, then, it is clear that in such matters the philosopher, more than other men, separates the soul from association with the body” After this Socrates is entitled to say: Striving for wisdom is comparable to dying, in that man turns from physical things. But where does he turn? He turns to the spiritual. However, can he expect the same of the spirit as of his senses? Socrates explains himself on this: “Now, how about the

acquisition of intelligent insight? Is the body a hindrance or not, if it is made to share in the search for wisdom? What I mean is this: Have the sight and hearing of men any truth in them, or is it true, as the poets are always telling us, that we neither hear nor see accurately? ... Then, when does the soul attain to truth? For when it tries to consider anything in company with the body, it is evidently deceived by it." All that we perceive with the physical senses comes into existence and dies away. And this coming into existence and dying away is the cause of our being deceived. But if we examine objects more thoroughly with intelligent insight, then we partake of the eternal in them. But the physical senses do not convey to us the eternal in its true form. They deceive us when we rely implicitly upon them. They cease to deceive us if we confront them with logical insight, making everything conveyed by the senses subject to examination by this insight. But if logical insight is to judge the statements of the senses, must not something live within this insight which transcends the perceptions of the senses? Hence what is true and false in objects is judged by something in us which opposes the material body, and therefore is not subject to its laws. Above all, this something must not be subjected to the laws of growth and decay, for it bears truth within itself. Truth cannot have a yesterday



and a tomorrow; it cannot be this on one occasion and that on another, as material things are. Hence truth in itself must be eternal. As the philosopher turns away from the transitory material world, and turns to truth, he approaches an eternal element, dwelling within him. If we immerse ourselves wholly in the spirit, then we live entirely in truth. The material world around us is no longer present in its material form only. "Would not that man," asks Socrates, "do this most perfectly who approaches each thing, so far as possible, with the reason alone, not introducing sight into his reasoning nor dragging in any of the other senses along with his thinking, but who employs pure, absolute reason in his attempt to search out the pure, absolute essence of things, and who removes himself, so far as possible, from eyes and ears, and, in a word, from his whole body because he feels that its companionship disturbs the soul and hinders it from attaining truth and wisdom? ... Well, then, this that we call death, is it not a release and separation from the body? But, as we hold, the true philosophers and they alone are always most eager to release the soul, and just this — the release and separation of the soul from the body — is their study ... Then, as I said in the beginning, it would be absurd if a man who had been all his life fitting himself to live as nearly in a state of death as he could, should then be disturbed when

death came to him ... In fact, then, the true philosophers practice dying, and death is less terrible to them than to any other men." Socrates also bases all higher morality on the liberation of the soul from the body. One who obeys only the demands of his body is not moral. Who has courage? asks Socrates. He has courage who not only disregards his body but follows the demands of his spirit when this endangers his body. And who is self-restrained? He who is "not excited by the passions and in being superior to them acts in a seemly way. Is self-restraint therefore not a characteristic of those alone who despise the body and pass their lives in philosophy?" And thus it is with all virtues, according to Socrates.

Socrates proceeds to characterize intelligent insight itself. What does cognition really mean? Doubtless we attain cognition through forming judgments. Very well, I form a judgment about something; for instance, I say to myself, This thing that stands before me is a tree. How do I arrive at such a statement? I shall be able to do so only if I already know what a tree is. I must *remember* my idea of a tree. A tree is a material thing. If I remember a tree, I remember a material object. I say that a thing is a tree if it reminds me of other things I have perceived before, and which I know to be trees. *Memory* enables me to reach cognition. Through

memory I can compare the various material things with each other. But in this my cognition is not exhausted. If I see two similar things I form the judgment, These things are similar. But in reality two things are never completely similar. Wherever I find similarity it is only relative. Therefore I think of similarity without finding it in material reality. The thought of similarity helps me toward judgment, as memory helps me toward judgment and cognition. Just as I remember trees when I see a tree, so I remember the thought of similarity when I see two similar things. Therefore thoughts arise within me like memories which are not gained from material reality. All cognition not derived from this reality is based on such thoughts. The whole of mathematics consists only of such thoughts. It would be a poor geometrician who could relate mathematically only what he sees with his eyes and grasps with his hands. It follows that we have thoughts which do not stem from transitory nature, but which arise from the spirit. And precisely these thoughts bear the stamp of eternal truth upon them. What mathematics teaches will be eternally true, even if the whole universe were to collapse tomorrow, and a totally new one arise. The present mathematical truths might not be applicable to the conditions prevailing in a new universe, nevertheless they would remain true in themselves. Only when the

soul is alone with itself can it bring forth such eternal truths out of itself. The soul therefore is related to truth, to the eternal, and not to the transitory, the seemingly real. For this reason Socrates says, "When the soul reflects alone by itself, it departs into the realm of the pure, the everlasting, the immortal and the changeless, and being akin to these, it dwells always with them whenever it is by itself and is not hindered, and it has rest from its wanderings and remains always the same and unchanging with the changeless, since it is in communion therewith. And this state of the soul is called wisdom ... Then see, if this is not the conclusion from all that we have said, that the soul is most like the divine and immortal and intellectual and uniform and indissoluble and ever unchanging, and the body, on the contrary, most like the human and mortal and multiform and unintellectual and dissoluble and ever-changing ... Then if it is in such a condition, the soul goes away into what is like itself, into the invisible, divine, immortal and wise, and when it arrives there it is happy, freed from error, folly, fear, fierce loves and all the other human ills and, as the initiated say, lives in truth through all after-time with the gods." Here we cannot undertake to show all the paths along which Socrates guides his friends to the eternal. All these paths breathe the same spirit. All are intended to show

that man finds one thing when he follows the paths of transitory sense perception, and another when his spirit is alone with itself. Socrates points to the archetypal nature of the spirit for those who listen to him. If they find it they can see with spiritual eyes that it is eternal. The dying Socrates does not prove immortality: he simply demonstrates the essence of the soul. It then becomes evident that growth and decay, birth and death have nothing to do with this soul. The essence of the soul lies in truth, but truth itself cannot grow and decay. The soul has as much to do with growth as the crooked has to do with the straight. Death, however, belongs to this process of "growth." Therefore the soul has nothing to do with death. Must we not say that the immortal assumes mortality as little as the straight assumes crookedness. Continuing from this, Socrates says, "If the immortal is also imperishable, it is impossible for the soul to perish when death comes to meet it. For, as our argument has shown, it will not admit death and will not be dead, just as the number three, we said, will never be even."

Let us trace the whole development of this dialogue, in which Socrates leads his listeners to the point where they are able to see the eternal in the human personality. The listeners absorb his thoughts; they

search within themselves for something in their own inner experiences through which they can say “yes” to his ideas. They put forward the objections that spring to their minds. What has happened to the listeners when the dialogue has reached its end? They have found something in themselves which they did not possess before. They have not merely absorbed an abstract truth; they have gone through a process of development. Something has come to life within them which was not alive in them before. Is not this comparable to an *initiation*? Does not this throw light on the reason why Plato expressed his philosophy in the form of dialogue? These dialogues are intended to be nothing but a literary form of the proceedings in the Mystery places. What Plato himself says at various points convinces us of this. As a teacher of philosophy, Plato wanted, insofar as possible through this medium, to be what the initiator was in the Mysteries. Well does Plato know himself to be at one with the methods of the Mysteries! He considers his method to be the right one only if it leads to the place to which the mystic should be led! He expresses this in the *Timaeus*: “All men who possess even a small share of good sense call upon God always at the outset of every undertaking, be it small or great: we therefore who are purposing to deliver a discourse concerning the Universe, how far it is created or is uncreated, must

needs invoke gods and goddesses (if so be that we are not utterly demented), praying that all we say may be approved by them in the first place, and secondly by ourselves.” And to those who seek along such a path, Plato promises “that the Godhead, as Savior, makes it possible that such a distant and difficult investigation — one so prone to error — can be accomplished through an enlightened philosophy.”

The *Timaeus* in particular reveals to us the relationship of Plato’s world conception with the Mysteries. At the very beginning of this dialogue, reference is made to an “initiation.” Solon is “initiated” into the creation of worlds by an Egyptian priest, and also into the manner in which myths that have been handed down, express eternal truths in picture form. “There have been and there will be many and divers destructions of mankind,” (thus the Egyptian priest instructs Solon) “of which the greatest are by fire and water, and lesser ones by countless other means. For in truth the story that is told in your country as well as in ours, how once upon a time Phaethon, son of Helios, yoked his father’s chariot, and, because he was unable to drive it along the course taken by his father, burnt up all that was upon the earth and himself perished by a thunderbolt -that story, as it is told, has the fashion of a legend, but the

truth of it lies in the occurrence of a shifting of the bodies in the heavens which move round the earth, and a destruction of the things on the earth by fierce fire, which recurs at long intervals.” — This point in the *Timaeus* clearly refers to the relationship between the initiate and the myths of the people. He perceives the truths hidden in their pictures.

The drama of the world’s creation is presented in the *Timaeus*. Whoever wishes to retrace the paths leading to this creation comes to the point of *divining* the archetypal force from which everything has sprung. “Now to discover the Maker and Father of this Universe were a task indeed; and having discovered Him, to declare Him unto all men were a *thing impossible*.” The mystic knew what was meant by this “thing impossible.” It indicates the drama of God. God is not present for him in the materially comprehensible world. There He is present as nature. He lies spell-bound in nature. According to the ancient mystics, only he can approach Him who awakens the divine within himself. Therefore He cannot so easily be made comprehensible to everyone. He does not appear in person, even to those who approach Him. This is what the *Timaeus* says. The Father has created the world out of the cosmic body and the cosmic soul. In perfect proportions He has united harmoniously the elements



which came into being when He offered His own, separate existence by diffusing Himself. Thus the body of the world came into existence. On this body of the world, the soul of the world is stretched in the *form of a cross*. This soul is the divine element in the world. It has met with death on the cross in order that the world may exist. Plato is able to call nature the *tomb* of the divine element. This is not a tomb containing something dead, but something eternal, for which death only gives the opportunity to express the omnipotence of life. Man sees this nature in the right light when he approaches it in order to deliver the crucified soul of the world. It must be raised from death, the spell must be lifted from it. Where can it come to life again? Only in the soul of the man who is initiated. In this way wisdom finds its right relationship to the cosmos. The resurrection, the deliverance of the Godhead: this is cognition. The evolution of the world from the least to the most perfect is traced in the *Timaeus*. An ascending process is represented. The beings develop. God reveals Himself in this development. The process of creation is a resurrection of God from the tomb. Man makes his appearance in this stream of evolution. Plato shows that with man something special has arrived. True, the whole world is divine. And man is no more divine than the other beings. But in the other beings God is concealed, and

in man He is manifest. The end of the *Timaeus* reads: “And now at length we may say that our discourse concerning the Universe has reached its termination. For this our Cosmos has received the living creatures both mortal and immortal and been thereby fulfilled; it being itself a visible Living Creature embracing the visible creatures, a perceptible God made in the image of the Intelligible, most great and good and fair and perfect in its creation — even this one and only begotten world.”

But this one and only begotten world would be incomplete if it did not have among its images the image of the Creator Himself. Only out of the soul of man can this image be born. It is not the Father Himself who can be born of man, but the *Son*, the offspring of God living in the soul, who is like unto the Father.

Philo of whom it was said that he was Plato reborn, called the wisdom born of man, the “Son of God;” this wisdom lives in the soul and contains the intelligence that exists in the world. This world-intelligence, the *Logos*, appears as the book in which “has been inscribed and engraved the formation of the world.” Further it appears as the Son of God, who “followed the ways of his Father, and shaped the different kinds,

looking to the archetypal patterns which that Father supplied.” In the manner of Plato, Philo speaks of this Logos as the Christ: “For since God is the first and sole King of the universe, the road leading to Him, being a king’s road, is rightly called royal. This road you must take to be philosophy ... the philosophy which the ancient circle of ascetics pursued in hard-fought contest, eschewing the soft enchantments of pleasure, engaged with a fine severity in the study of what is good and fair. This royal road then, which we have just said to be true and genuine philosophy, is called in the Law, the utterance and *word* of God.”

Philo experiences this as an initiation when he sets forth on the path to meet the Logos who is, for him, the Son of God. “I feel no shame in recording my own experience, a thing I know from its having happened to me a thousand times. On some occasions, after making up my mind to follow the usual course of writing on philosophical tenets, and knowing definitely the substance of what I was to set down, I have found my understanding incapable of giving birth to a single idea, and have given up without accomplishing anything, reviling my understanding for its self-conceit, and filled with amazement at the might of Him Who is, to Whom is due the opening and closing of the womb of the soul. On other occasions, I

have approached my work empty and suddenly become full, the ideas falling in a shower from above and being sown invisibly, so that under the influence of the divine possession I have been filled with corybantic frenzy and been unconscious of anything, place, persons present, myself, words spoken, lines written. For I obtained language, ideas, an enjoyment of light, keenest vision, pellucid distinctness of objects, such as might be received through the inner eye as the result of clearest cognition.” — This is the description of a path to cognition which is so arranged that whoever takes this path is conscious that he becomes one with the divine when the *Logos* comes to life within him. This is clearly expressed in the words: “When the mind is mastered by the love of the divine, when it strains its powers to reach the inmost shrine, when it puts forth every effort and ardor on its forward march, under the divine impelling force it forgets all else, forgets itself and fixes its thoughts and memories on Him alone Whose attendant and servant it is, to Whom it dedicates incense, the incense of consecrated virtues.” — For Philo there are only two paths. Either man can pursue the material world which is offered by perception and intellect, but then he is limited to his own personality, he withdraws from the cosmos; or he can become conscious of the all-embracing cosmic powers, experiencing the eternal

within his personality. "One who runs away from God takes refuge in himself. There are two minds, that of the universe, which is God, and the individual mind. One who flees from his own mind flees for refuge to the Mind of all things. For one who abandons his own mind acknowledges all that makes the human mind its standard to be naught, and he refers all things to God. On the other hand, one who runs away from God declares Him to be the cause of nothing, and himself to be the cause of all things that come into being."

Plato's world-conception aims to be a form of cognition which in its whole nature is religion. It brings cognition into relationship with the highest man can reach through his feelings. Plato allows cognition to be valid only when it completely satisfies man's feelings. Then it is not pictorial knowledge; it is the content of life. It is a higher man in man. The personality is but an image of this higher man. In man himself the superior, the *archetypal man* is born. And with this another secret of the Mysteries is expressed in Plato's philosophy. The Church Father *Hippolytus* points to this secret: "This is the great and ineffable mystery of the Samothracians (the guardians of a particular Mystery-cult) which it is permissible only for the initiated to know. For the Samothracians expressly

hand down, in the Mysteries that are celebrated among them, that Adam is the archetypal man.”

Plato’s “dialogue on love,” the *Symposium*, also describes an “initiation.” Here love appears as the herald of wisdom. If wisdom, the Eternal Word (Logos), is the Son of the Eternal Creator of the world, then love has a maternal relationship with this Logos. Before it is possible for even a spark of the light of wisdom to light up in the human soul, there must be an unconscious longing, which draws the soul toward the divine. Man must be drawn unconsciously toward that which, when raised into consciousness, subsequently brings him supreme joy. What Heraclitus designates as the *daemon* in man is united with the idea of love. — In the *Symposium* men of the most varied status, possessing the most varied views on life, speak of love; the man in the street, the politician, the scientist, the poet of comedy, Aristophanes and the serious poet, Agathon. Each has his conception of love according to how he experiences life. How they express themselves reveals the stage at which their “daemon” stands. Through love one being is drawn to another. The manifold variety of things into which the divine unity is diffused strives through love toward oneness and harmony. Love therefore has a divine quality. Hence each man is capable of understanding

it only insofar as he has partaken of this divine quality. After these men, representing varying stages of maturity, have declared their views on love, Socrates takes up the discussion. He considers love from the viewpoint of a thinker capable of cognition. For him love is not a god. But it is something leading man to God. *Eros*, love, is no god for him. God is perfect, and therefore possesses beauty and goodness. But Eros is only the longing for beauty and goodness. Therefore he stands between man and God. He is a “daemon,” a mediator between the earthly and the divine. — It is significant that Socrates does not pretend to give his thoughts when he speaks about love. He says he is only recounting a *revelation* about it, which a woman gave him. He has conceived an idea of love’s nature through mantic art. The priestess Diotima awakened in Socrates the daemoniac force which was to lead him to the divine. She “initiated” him. — This passage in the *Symposium* is most revealing. We must ask, Who is this “wise woman” who awakens the daemon in Socrates? We should not think of mere poetic fantasy here. No actual wise woman could have awakened the daemon in the soul if the force for this awakening were not within the soul itself. We must seek this “wise woman” in the soul of Socrates himself. There must, however, be a basis which allows what brings the daemon to birth in the soul to appear as a being in

external reality. This force cannot work in the same way as the forces we can observe in the soul as belonging to it and at home with it. We see that it is the force of the soul before it has received wisdom, which Socrates represents as the “wise woman.” It is the *maternal* principle which gives birth to the Son of God, Wisdom, the Logos. The unconscious force of the soul is presented as a feminine element, which allows the divine to enter consciousness. The soul which as yet lacks wisdom is the mother of what leads to the divine. This leads us to an important idea of mysticism. The soul is recognized as the mother of the divine. With the inevitability of a natural force it *unconsciously* leads man toward the divine. — This point throws light on the conception held in the Mysteries regarding Greek mythology. The world of the gods is born in the soul. Man regards as his gods what he himself creates in the form of pictures. But he must progress to another idea. He must transform into pictures of the gods the divine force present in himself which is active before the creation of these pictures of the gods. The mother of the divine appears behind the divine, and this is none other than the original force in the human soul. Man places goddesses beside his gods. Let us look at the myth of Dionysus in the light of the above. Dionysus is the son of Zeus and a mortal mother, Semele. Zeus tears the premature infant from



the mother as she lies slain by lightning, keeping him in his own thigh until he is mature. Hera, the mother of the gods, stirs up the Titans against Dionysus. They *dismember* the boy. But Pallas Athene rescues the still beating heart and brings it to Zeus. Thereupon Zeus begets the son for the second time. In this myth we have an exact description of a process which takes place in the depths of the human soul. Whoever wishes to speak in the sense of the Egyptian priest who instructs Solon about the nature of a myth could speak as follows: What you tell us, that Dionysus, the son of a god and a mortal mother, is dismembered and is born again, may sound like a fable, but what is true about it is the birth of the divine and its destiny in the human soul. The divine unites with the temporal-earthly soul of man. As soon as this divine element, Dionysus, comes to life, the soul experiences a great longing for its true spiritual status. The consciousness which once again appears in the image of a female divinity, Hera, is jealous of the birth out of a better consciousness. It stirs up the lower nature of man — the Titans. The child of god, still immature, is dismembered. It is present in man as a dismembered material-intellectual science. But if in man sufficient higher wisdom (Zeus) is at work, it cherishes and cares for the immature child, which then is born again as the second son of god (Dionysus). Thus out of science, out

of the dismembered divine force in man, is born the harmonizing wisdom, which is the Logos, the son of God and of a mortal mother, who is the transitory soul of man striving unconsciously for the divine. We are far from the spiritual reality represented in all this as long as we see in it only a mere process of the soul and take it as a *picture* of this process. In this spiritual reality the soul does not merely experience something within itself; it is completely disconnected from itself and participates in a cosmic process which in truth takes place outside itself and not within it.

Platonic wisdom and Greek mythology unite; so, equally, do Mystery wisdom and mythology. The gods that they created were the objects of the religion of the people; the history of their coming into existence was the secret of the Mysteries. No wonder that it was accounted dangerous to “betray” the Mysteries. This meant “betraying” the origin of the gods of the people. And the right understanding of this origin is wholesome; misunderstanding is destructive.

## **Mystery, Wisdom and Myth**

THE MYSTIC SOUGHT within himself for forces, for beings which remain unknown to man so long as he is limited by the ordinary conception of life. The mystic formulates the great question about his own spiritual forces, which go beyond lower nature, and their laws. With his ordinary materialistic, logical conception of life, man creates gods for himself, or if he gains insight into this creation he disowns them. The mystic perceives that *he* creates gods; he perceives *why* he creates them; he can, so to speak, see beyond the natural laws of the creation of gods. It is the same with him as it would be with a plant if it suddenly acquired knowledge and learned to know the laws governing its own growth and development. The plant develops in innocent unconsciousness. If it knew its own laws it would have to acquire an entirely new relationship to itself. The plant which has acquired knowledge would have before it as an ideal what the poet experiences when he sings about it, what the botanist thinks when he investigates its laws. — The same is true of the mystic with respect to *his* laws and the forces working within him. As one who knows, he must create beyond himself a divine element. This was the attitude of the initiates toward what the people had created beyond

nature. This was their attitude toward the popular world of gods and myths. They wished to perceive the laws of this world of gods and myths. Where the people had a divinity, a myth, there they sought a higher truth. — Let us consider an example: The Athenians were compelled by the Cretan King Minos to deliver to him seven boys and seven girls every eight years. These were thrown as food to the Minotaur, a fearful monster. When for the third time the sad consignment was to leave for Crete, the king's son, Theseus, traveled with them. When he arrived in Crete, King Minos' own daughter, Ariadne, took his part. The Minotaur lived in a labyrinth, a maze from which, once one had wandered into it, he could not find his way out again. Theseus wished to free his homeland from the disgraceful tribute. He had to enter the labyrinth, into which the monster's prey was usually thrown. He wished to slay the Minotaur. He undertook this task; he overcame the fearful foe and again reached freedom with the aid of a ball of thread which Ariadne had given him. — The mystic had to recognize how the creative spirit of man comes to form such a tale. As the botanist contemplates the growth of a plant to discover its laws, so the mystic wished to contemplate the creating spirit. He sought *truth*, wisdom, where the people had set up a myth. Sallustius discloses the attitude of a mystic-sage

toward such a myth: "The universe itself can be called a myth, since bodies and material objects are apparent in it, while souls and minds are concealed. Furthermore, to wish to teach all men the truth about the gods causes the foolish to despise, because they cannot learn, and the good to be slothful, whereas to conceal the truth by myths prevents the former from despising philosophy and compels the latter to study it."

The mystic was conscious that by seeking the truth contained in a myth, he was adding something to what was present in the consciousness of the people. It was clear to him that he was placing himself above this consciousness of the people just as a botanist places himself above the growing plant. He said something quite different from what was present in the mythological consciousness, but he looked upon what he said as a deeper truth which was symbolically expressed in the myth. Man confronts the material world as if it were a monstrous enemy. To it he sacrifices the fruits of his personality. It devours them. It does so until the conqueror (Theseus) awakens in man. His cognition spins for him the thread by which he finds his way when he enters the maze of the material world to slay his foe. The mystery of human cognition itself is expressed in this conquering of the

material world. The mystic knows this mystery. It indicates a force in the human personality. Ordinary consciousness is unaware of this force. But the latter works within it nevertheless. It engenders the myth which has the same *structure* as the mystical truth. This truth is symbolized in the myth. — What then are myths? They are a creation of the spirit, of the unconsciously creative soul. The soul is governed by entirely definite laws. It must work in a definite direction in order to create beyond itself. On the mythological level it does this in pictures, but these pictures are built up according to the laws of the soul. We could also say that when the soul progresses beyond the plane of mythological consciousness to the deeper truths, these bear the same stamp as the myths did before, because one and the same force is active in their creation. The Neoplatonic philosopher, Plotinus (204–269 A. D.), referring to the Egyptian priest-sages, speaks thus about this relationship between the way of thinking common to pictorial myths and higher cognition:

“The wise of Egypt — whether in precise knowledge or by a prompting of nature — indicated the truth where, in their effort toward philosophical statement, they left aside the writing, forms that take in the details of words and sentences — those characters

that represent sounds and convey the propositions of reasoning — and drew pictures instead, engraving in the temple-inscriptions a separate image for every separate item: thus they exhibited the thought-content in which the Supreme goes forth. For each manifestation of knowledge and wisdom is a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity, not an aggregate of discursive argument and detailed discussion. Later from this wisdom in unity there appears, in another form of existence, an image, already less compact, which announces the original in an outward stage and seeks the causes by which things are such that the wonder arises how a created world can be so excellent.”

Whoever wishes to become acquainted with the relationship between mysticism and mythological tales, must see how mythology is dealt with by the world conception of those whose wisdom accords with the method of thinking of the Mysteries. Such accord exists to the fullest extent in Plato. His interpretation of myths and his use of them in his exposition, may be taken as a standard. In the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue about the soul, the myth of Boreas is introduced. This divine being, which was seen in the rushing wind, once glimpsed the beautiful Orithea, daughter of the Greek King Erechtheus, as she was picking flowers with her

playmates. He was seized with a passion for her, abducted her and took her to his cave. In this dialogue Plato causes Socrates to reject a purely rational explanation of this myth. According to such an explanation an external, natural fact is supposed to be related symbolically in the tale. A gale is supposed to have seized the king's daughter and flung her down from the cliff. "Such explanations," says Socrates, "are very subtle and may be very entertaining ... But when one has once begun to give a rational explanation to one of these mythological figures, one must go on and look at all the others with the same scepticism and reduce them one after another to the rules of probability ... This sort of explanation would be the business of a life. If anyone disbelieves in these mythological figures, and, with a rustic kind of wisdom, undertakes to explain each in accordance with probability, he will need a great deal of leisure. But I have no leisure for such inquiries ... So I dismiss these matters and, accepting the customary belief about them as I was saying just now, I investigate not these things, but *myself*, to know whether I am a monster of a more complicated structure and more savage than Typhon, or a gentler and simpler creature, whose nature partakes of divinity." From this we see that a rationalistic, intellectual interpretation of myths was unacceptable to Plato. This must be considered



together with the manner in which he himself makes use of myths to express his meaning through them. Where he speaks of the life of the soul, where he leaves the paths of the transitory and seeks out the eternal in the soul, where, therefore, the ideas supported by material perception and intellectual thought are no longer present, there Plato makes use of the myth. The *Phaedrus* speaks of the eternal in the soul. Here the soul is represented as a team of two many-winged horses with a charioteer. One of the horses is patient and wise, the other stubborn and wild. When the team encounters an obstruction in its path, the stubborn horse makes use of this to hinder the intentions of the good one and thwart the charioteer. When the team arrives at the point where it should follow the gods over the heavens, the bad horse brings it into a state of confusion. Whether the bad horse is overcome by the good and the team is able to enter the supersensible realm beyond the obstruction, depends on the power of the bad horse. So it happens that the soul is never able to raise itself unhindered to the realm of the divine. Some souls raise themselves to this vision of eternity in a greater degree than others. The soul which has seen the beyond remains safe until the next traverse; the soul which — because of the wild horse — has seen nothing, must make the attempt on a new traverse. By

these traverses are meant the various incarnations of the soul. One traverse denotes the life of the soul in one personality. The wild horse represents the lower nature, the wise horse the higher nature, and the charioteer the soul longing for its apotheosis. Plato makes use of the myth to show the path of the eternal soul through various stages. Similarly, in other writings of Plato, myth or symbolical narrative is used to show the inner being of man, the part not perceptible to the senses.

Here Plato is in full accord with the manner of expression by myth and parable used by others. In ancient Indian literature we find a parable attributed to Buddha. A man much attached to life, who on no account wishes to die, who seeks for sensual pleasure, is pursued by four serpents. He hears a voice which commands him to feed and bathe the four serpents from time to time. The man runs away for fear of the evil serpents. Again he hears a voice. This draws his attention to five murderers who are coming after him. Again the man runs away. A voice draws his attention to a sixth murderer who wishes to strike off his head with a drawn sword. Again the man flees. He comes to a deserted village. He hears a voice which tells him that thieves will shortly plunder the village. As he continues to flee he comes to a great expanse of

water. He does not feel safe on this shore; he makes a basket for himself out of straw, sticks and leaves; in this he reaches the further shore. Now he is safe; he is a Brahmin. The sense of this parable is that man must pass through the most varied conditions to attain to the divine. In the four serpents may be seen the four elements, fire, water, earth and air. In the five murderers may be seen the five senses. The deserted village is the soul which has fled from the impressions of the senses, but is not yet safe when alone with itself. If the soul inwardly takes hold of its lower nature only, it must perish. Man must fashion a boat for himself which will carry him over the waters of the transitory from one shore, material nature, to the other, the eternal and divine.

Let us consider the Egyptian mystery of Osiris in this light. Gradually Osiris had become one of the most important Egyptian divinities. His representation supplanted other representations of gods in certain parts of the country. A significant series of myths formed itself around the figures of Osiris and his consort Isis. Osiris was the son of the sun god; Typhon-Set was his brother and Isis his sister. Osiris married his sister. With her he reigned over Egypt. The evil brother, Typhon, plotted the destruction of Osiris. He caused a casket to be made of the exact size of Osiris.

At a banquet the casket was offered as a gift to anyone who exactly fitted into it. No one succeeded in this but Osiris. He laid himself in it. Then Typhon and his accomplices hurled themselves upon Osiris, closed the casket and threw it into the river. When Isis received the dreadful news she was desperate and wandered everywhere searching for the corpse of her husband. When she had found him, Typhon again gained power over him. He tore him into fourteen pieces, which were scattered far apart in different districts. Various tombs of Osiris were shown in Egypt. Here and there in many places pieces of the god were said to have been laid to rest. Osiris himself ascended from the nether world and conquered Typhon; a ray from Osiris then fell upon Isis, who bore him the son Harpocrates or Horus.

Now let us compare this myth with the way the world was understood by the Greek philosopher Empedocles (490–430 B. C.). He assumes that the single archetypal being was torn into the four elements, fire, water, earth and air — into the multiplicity of existence. He sets in opposition to each other two powers which affect growth and decay within the world of existence: love and strife. Empedocles says of the elements:

“There are these alone; but, running through one another, They become men and the tribes of beasts. At one time all are brought together into one order by *Love*; At another, each is carried in different directions by the repulsion of *Strife*.”

Then from Empedocles’ standpoint what are the things of the world? They are the elements, variously mixed. They could come into existence only through the tearing apart of the archetypal One into the four entities. This archetypal One is diffused into the elements of the world. All the things that meet us partake of the diffused divinity, but this divinity is hidden within them. It first had to die, so that the things could come into existence. And what are these things? They are mixtures of portions of the god, influenced in their structure by love and hate. Empedocles says this distinctly:

“This is manifest in the mass of mortal limbs. At one time all the limbs that are the body’s portion Are brought together by Love in blooming life’s high season; At another, severed by cruel Strife, They wander each alone by the breakers of life’s sea. It is the same with plants, with fish that live in waters, With beasts living on hills, with seabirds sailing on wings.”

Empedocles must take the view that the sage rediscovers the divine archetypal unity which is

spellbound in the world, interwoven with love and hate. But if man is to find the divine he himself must become divine, for Empedocles takes his stand on the basis that only equals can recognize each other. His conviction of the laws of cognition is expressed in Goethe's saying, "If the eye were not of the nature of the sun how could we see the light? If God's own power did not live within us how could we strive for the divine?"

In the myth of Osiris the mystic is able to find these thoughts about the world and man, which transcend the experience of the senses. The divine creative force is diffused in the world. It appears as the four elements. The god (Osiris) has been slain. Man, with his cognition, which is of a divine nature, is to wake him again; he is to find him again as Horus (Son of God, Logos, Wisdom) in the antithesis of Strife (Typhon) and Love (Isis). Empedocles expresses his basic conviction in Greek form with ideas reminiscent of the myths. Aphrodite is Love; Neikos, Strife. They bind and release the elements.

Such an exposition of the content of a myth must not be confused with a merely symbolical or allegorical interpretation. This is not intended here. The pictures comprising the content of a myth are not

invented symbols for abstract truths, but real soul experiences of the initiate. He experiences the pictures with spiritual organs of perception as a normal man experiences the representations of material things with his eyes and ears. Just as the representation is of little value by itself if it is not activated by perception of the external object, so the mythological picture is of little value without its activation through real occurrences in the spiritual world. It is only with respect to the material world that man at first stands outside the activating things; on the other hand, he can experience the mythological pictures only when he stands within the corresponding spiritual events. To be able to stand within the latter, in the opinion of the ancient mystics, he must have passed through initiation. There the spiritual events which he sees are illustrated as it were, by the mythological pictures. Whoever is unable to take mythology as such an *illustration* of true spiritual events, has not yet advanced to a comprehension of mythology. For the spiritual events themselves are *supersensible*, and pictures whose content is reminiscent of the material world are not in themselves spiritual, but are merely an illustration of the spiritual. Whoever lives only in pictures, lives in a dream; he lives in spiritual perception only when he has reached the point of experiencing the spiritual in

the picture, just as in the material world one experiences the rose through the representation of the rose. This is also the reason why the pictures presented by myths cannot have only a single meaning. Because of their illustrative character the same myths can express various spiritual facts. It is, therefore, no contradiction when interpreters of myths apply them now to one spiritual fact and again to a different one.

From this point of view a thread can be found running through the manifold Greek myths. Let us consider the legend of Hercules. The twelve labors imposed on Hercules are seen in a higher light when one reflects that before the last and most difficult one he was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries. At the command of King Eurystheus of Mycenae he was to fetch Cerberus, the hound of hell, from the nether world, and take him back there again. To be able to undertake a journey into the nether world, Hercules had to be an initiate. The Mysteries led man through the death of the transitory and thus into the nether world; through initiation they wished to save the eternal element in him from destruction. As a mystic he could overcome death. Hercules overcame the dangers of the nether world as a mystic. This justifies the interpretation of his other deeds as stages of the



inner development of the soul. He overcame the Nemean lion and brought him to Mycenae. This means that he became master of the purely physical force in man; he tamed it. Next he slew the nine-headed Hydra. He overcame it with firebrands, dipping his arrows in its gall so that they would never miss their mark. This means that he overcame lower knowledge, the knowledge of the senses, through the fire of the spirit, and out of what he had gained from this lower knowledge he drew the strength to see the lower world in the light belonging to the spiritual eye. Hercules caught the doe of Artemis. The latter is the goddess of the chase. Hercules hunted down what the free nature of the human soul can offer. The other labors can be interpreted in a similar way. We cannot follow them in every detail here; our intention is only to show how the general sense of the myth itself points to inner development

A similar interpretation is possible for the voyage of the Argonauts. Phrixus and his sister Helle, children of a Boeotian king, suffered greatly at the hands of their stepmother. The gods sent a ram with a golden fleece to them, which carried them away through the air. As they crossed the straits between Europe and Asia, Helle was drowned. Hence the straits are called the Hellespont. Phrixus reached the king of Colchis on the

eastern shore of the Black Sea. He sacrificed the ram to the gods and presented the fleece to the King Aetes. The latter had it hung in a grove and guarded by a frightful dragon. The Greek hero, Jason, together with the other heroes, Hercules, Theseus and Orpheus, undertook to fetch the fleece from Colchis. Jason was charged with difficult tasks before he could reach the treasure of Aetes. But Medea, the daughter of the king, who was versed in magic, helped him. He tamed two fire-breathing bulls; he ploughed a field and sowed dragons' teeth, so that armed men grew out of the earth. On the advice of Medea he threw a stone among the men, whereupon they murdered one another. By means of a magic potion from Medea, Jason put the dragon to sleep; then he was able to obtain the fleece. With this he embarked upon the return journey to Greece. Medea accompanied him as his wife. The king pursued the fugitives. To delay him, Medea slew her little brother Absyrtus, scattering his limbs upon the sea. Aetes was delayed in gathering them up. Hence the couple were able to reach Jason's home with the fleece. — Here every single fact demands a deeper explanation. The fleece is something belonging to man, something of infinite value to him; in ancient times it was separated from him and its recapture involves the overcoming of terrible powers. So it is with the eternal in the human

soul. It belongs to man. But he finds himself separated from it. His lower nature separates him from it. Only when he overcomes this lower nature, puts the latter to sleep, can he regain it. This is possible when his own consciousness (Medea) comes to his aid with its magic force. Medea becomes for Jason what Diotima, as the teacher of love, was for Socrates . Human wisdom possesses the magic force to reach the divine after overcoming the transitory. Out of the lower nature can come only a lower human element, the armed men, which is overcome by the force of the spiritual element, the advice of Medea. Even when man has found his eternal element, the Recce, he is not yet safe. He must sacrifice a part of his consciousness (Absyrtus). This is demanded by the material world, which we can conceive of only as manifold (torn to pieces). We could penetrate still more deeply into the description of the spiritual events lying behind these pictures, but here we intend only to indicate the principle of myth formation.

Of particular interest in relation to such an interpretation is the saga of Prometheus. Prometheus and Epimetheus were the sons of the Titan, Japetos. The Titans were the children of the oldest generation of the gods, of Uranos (Heaven) and Gaia (Earth). Kronos, the youngest of the Titans, dethroned his

father and seized the rulership of the world. For this, together with the remaining Titans, he was overpowered by his son Zeus. And Zeus became supreme among the gods. In the battle with the Titans, Prometheus stood at the side of Zeus. On his advice Zeus banished the Titans into the nether world. But the Titans' attitude of mind continued to live in Prometheus. He was only half a friend to Zeus. When Zeus wished to destroy men for their presumption, Prometheus took their part, teaching them the art of numbers and writing, as well as other things leading to culture, especially the use of fire. Because of this Zeus was angry with Prometheus. Hephaestus, the son of Zeus, was commissioned to fashion the image of a woman of great beauty, which the gods adorned with all kinds of gifts. This woman was known as Pandora, the all-gifted. Hermes, the messenger of the gods, brought her to Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus. She brought him a casket as a gift from the gods. Epimetheus accepted the gift, despite the fact that Prometheus had advised him on no account to accept a gift from the gods. When the casket was opened, out flew all kinds of human plagues. Hope alone remained inside, and that only because Pandora quickly closed the lid. Therefore Hope has remained as the doubtful gift of the gods. — At the command of Zeus, Prometheus was chained to a rock in the Caucasus

because of his relationship with men. An eagle constantly fed upon his liver, which continually renewed itself. Prometheus had to pass his days in tortured solitude until one of the gods voluntarily sacrificed himself, that is, dedicated himself to death. The tortured one bore his suffering steadfastly. He had learned that Zeus would be dethroned by the son of a mortal woman if he did not marry her. Zeus was anxious to know this secret; he sent the messenger of the gods, Hermes, to Prometheus to discover something about it. Prometheus denied him any information. — The legend of Hercules is linked with that of Prometheus. During his travels Hercules also came to the Caucasus. He killed the eagle which was consuming the liver of Prometheus. The centaur, Chiron, who could not die, although suffering from an incurable wound, sacrificed himself for Prometheus. Then the latter was reconciled with the gods.

The Titans are the force of will streaming from the original cosmic spirit (Uranos) in the form of nature (Kronos). Here we must not think of merely abstract forces of will, but of real beings of will. Prometheus belongs among the latter. This characterizes his being. But he is not entirely a Titan. In a certain sense he sides with Zeus, the spirit who assumed the rulership of the world after the unbridled nature-force (Kronos)

had been tamed. Prometheus, therefore, represents those worlds which have given man that forward-striving, which is a force half of nature, half of spirit — the will. On the one side the will is directed toward good, on the other side toward evil. Its destiny is formed according to whether it inclines toward the spiritual or the transitory. This destiny is the destiny of man himself. Man is chained to the transitory. The eagle gnaws at him. He must endure it. He can only attain the heights when he seeks his destiny in solitude. He has a secret. Its content is that the divine (Zeus) must marry a mortal, human consciousness itself, which is bound to the physical body, in order to bring forth a son, human wisdom (the Logos), who will redeem the god. Through this, consciousness becomes immortal. Man may not betray this secret until a mystic (Hercules) approaches him and removes the power which continually threatens him with death. A being, half animal, half human — a centaur — must sacrifice himself to redeem man. The centaur is man himself, the half animal, half spiritual man. He must die so that the purely spiritual man may be redeemed. What Prometheus, the human will, despises, is taken by Epimetheus, the intellect, shrewdness. But the gifts offered to Epimetheus are only troubles and plagues. For the intellect clings to nothingness, to the transitory. And only one thing remains — the hope

that out of the transitory, one day the eternal may be born.

The thread running through the legends of the Argonauts, Hercules and Prometheus, also holds good for the poem of the *Odyssey* by Homer. The use of this method of interpretation in studying the latter work, may appear forced. But upon a closer examination of everything that has to be considered, even the most hardened doubter must lose his misgivings about such an interpretation. Above all, it must surprise us to find it related of Odysseus also that he descended to the nether world. Whatever we may think of the author of the *Odyssey* in other respects, it is impossible to credit him with causing a mortal being to descend to the nether world without bringing him into relationship with all that the journey to the nether world signified in the Greek world conception. It signified the overcoming of the transitory and the awakening of the eternal in the soul. That Odysseus achieved this must, therefore, be admitted. With this his experiences, like those of Hercules, gain a deeper meaning. They become a description of something which does not belong to the material world, a description of the soul's path of development. In addition, the *Odyssey* is not related as one would expect of a sequence of external facts. The hero makes voyages on magic

ships. Actual geographical distances are treated in a most arbitrary way. Material reality is simply irrelevant. This becomes comprehensible if the actual events are related only in order to illustrate spiritual development. Furthermore, the author himself states in his introduction to the work, that it deals with the search for the *soul*: “Tell me, O Muse, of the man of many devices, who wandered full many ways after he had reached the sacred citadel of Troy. Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose mind he learned, aye, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea, seeking to win his *own soul* and the return of his comrades.”

Here we have a man seeking for the soul, the divine element, and his wanderings in search of this divine element are related. — He comes to the land of the Cyclops. These are ungainly giants with one eye in their foreheads. Polyphemus, the most terrible of them, devours several of his companions. Odysseus saves himself by blinding the Cyclops. Here we are dealing with the first stage of life’s pilgrimage. Physical power, the lower nature, must be overcome. Whoever does not deprive it of its strength, whoever does not blind it, will be devoured by it. — Odysseus then reaches the island of the witch Circe. She transforms some of his companions into grunting



swine. She also is conquered by him. Circe represents the lower spiritual force which clings to the transitory. Through abuse of this force she can thrust humanity only deeper into its animal nature. — Odysseus must overcome her. Then he can descend into the nether world. He becomes a mystic. Now he is exposed to the dangers which beset a mystic on his ascent from the lower to the higher stages of initiation. He reaches the Sirens who lure passing travelers to their death with sounds of enchanting sweetness. These are the images produced by the lower fantasy, the first things to be followed by anyone who has freed himself from the material world. He has come as far as free creative activity, but not as far as the initiated spirit. He chases after illusory images and must free himself from their power. — Odysseus must traverse the awesome passage between Scylla and Charybdis. In his early stages the mystic wavers between spirit and sensuality. He is still unable to grasp the full content of the spirit, but sensuality has already lost its earlier value. All Odysseus' companions perish in a shipwreck; he alone saves himself and finds the nymph Calypso, who receives him in friendship and cares for him for *seven* years. At last, at the command of Zeus, she releases him to return to his home. The mystic has reached a stage at which all who are striving with him, fail, except Odysseus, who alone is

worthy. In peace this worthy one enjoys gradual initiation for a period defined by the mystically symbolical number *seven*. — Before Odysseus reaches his home, however, he comes to the island of the Phaeacians. Here he is hospitably received. The king's daughter is interested in him and King Alcinous himself entertains him and does him honor. Once again Odysseus encounters the world and its pleasures, and the spirit which cling to the world (Nausicaä) awakens in him. However, he finds the way home to the divine. At first nothing good awaits him at home. His wife, Penelope, is surrounded by numerous suitors. To each she promises marriage when she has finished a certain piece of weaving. She avoids keeping her promise by unraveling at night what she has woven during the day. The suitors must be overcome by Odysseus so that he may be reunited with his wife in peace. The goddess Athene transforms him into a beggar so that he will not be recognized at once upon entering his house. Then he overcomes the suitors. — Odysseus seeks his own deeper consciousness, the divine forces of the soul. He wishes to be united with them. Before the mystic finds them he must overcome everything which lays claim to this consciousness in the form of a suitor. This crowd of suitors comes from the world of lower reality, of transitory nature. The logic applicable to this world is

a weaving which continually unravels itself after it has been spun. Wisdom (the goddess Athene) is the sure guide to the deepest forces of the soul. She transforms man into a beggar, i.e. she divests him of all that is derived from the transitory.

The Eleusinian Festivals, celebrated in Greece in honor of Demeter and Dionysus, appear steeped in Mystery wisdom. A sacred road led from Athens to Eleusis. It was marked with secret signs which could bring the soul into a mood of deep reverence. In Eleusis were secret temple buildings which were served by priestly families. Dignity and the wisdom with which this dignity was connected, were inherited in these priest families from generation to generation. (Information concerning these places of worship may be found in the book, *Ergänzungen zu den letzten Untersuchungen auf der Acropolis in Athen* by Karl Bötticher, *Philologus*, Suppl. Vol. 3 Section 3.) The wisdom making it possible for services to be enacted there, was the Greek Mystery wisdom. The festivals, celebrated twice yearly, displayed the great cosmic drama of the destiny of the divine in the world and the destiny of the human soul. The Minor Mysteries were celebrated in February, the Major Mysteries in September. Initiations were connected with the festivals. The symbolical presentation of the drama of

man and the cosmos formed the concluding act of the initiations undertaken there. The Eleusinian temples were erected in honor of the goddess Demeter. She is a daughter of Kronos. She bore a daughter, Persephone, to Zeus, before his marriage to Hera. Once while Persephone was playing, she was kidnaped by Pluto, the god of the nether world. Demeter, lamenting, hastened to search for her all over the earth. In Eleusis the daughters of Keleus, a local ruler, found Demeter sitting on a rock. Taking the form of an old woman she entered the service of Keleus' family as nurse to the son of the ruler's wife. She wished to endow this son with immortality. Therefore she hid him every night in the fire. When the mother once observed this, she wept and lamented. Henceforth the bestowal of immortality was impossible. Demeter left the house. Keleus built a temple. Demeter's sorrow for Persephone was limitless. She caused famine to spread over the earth. To avoid disaster the gods were obliged to placate her. Pluto was persuaded by Zeus to allow Persephone to return to the upper world. Before this, however, the god of the nether world gave her a pomegranate to eat. Because of this she was compelled to return to the nether world again and again at regular intervals. From then on she spent one third of the year in the nether world and two thirds in the upper world. Demeter was reconciled; she

returned to Olympus. But in Eleusis, the place of her anguish, she founded the service of the festivals to commemorate her fate for ever.

The meaning of the Demeter-Persephone myth is not difficult to recognize. It is the soul which alternates between the lower and the upper world. The eternity of the soul and its eternal transformation through birth and death, is represented pictorially. The soul is descended from Demeter, the immortal. But it is carried off by the transitory and becomes destined to share in the fate of the transitory. It has eaten the fruit in the nether world; the human soul is satiated with the transitory and therefore cannot dwell continually in the divine heights. It must always return to the realm of the transitory. Demeter represents that being from which human consciousness has sprung; but this consciousness must be thought of as having been able to come into existence through the spiritual forces of the earth. Thus Demeter is the archetypal being of the earth, and her gift to the earth in the form of the forces in the seeds and the produce of the fields, only indicates a still deeper aspect of her being. This being wishes to endow humanity with immortality. Demeter hides her nursling in the fire at night. But man cannot endure the pure power of fire (the spirit). Demeter must desist. She can only found the temple service

through which man may participate in the divine insofar as he is able to do so.

The Eleusinian Festivals were an eloquent acknowledgment of belief in the eternity of the human soul. This acknowledgment found pictorial expression in the myth about Persephone. Dionysus was celebrated in Eleusis, together with Demeter and Persephone. As in Demeter was worshiped the divine creatrix of the eternal in man, so in Dionysus was worshiped the divine element, ever changing in the whole world. The god who had been diffused into the world and had been torn to pieces in order to be re-born spiritually , had to be celebrated together with Demeter. (A splendid presentation of the spirit of the Eleusinian Mysteries is to be found in the book, *Sanctuaires d'Orient* by Édouard Schuré. Paris, 1898.)

## **Egyptian Mystery Wisdom**

“WHEN RELEASED FROM THE BODY YOU ascend to the free aether, you will become an immortal god, escaping death.” In these words Empedocles epitomizes what the ancient Egyptians thought about the eternal in man and its connection with the divine. Evidence of this is provided by the so-called *Book of The Dead* which has been deciphered by the diligence of nineteenth century research workers. (See Lepsius, *Das Totenbuch der alten Ägypter*, Berlin, 1842.) It is “the greatest coherent literary work of the Egyptians which has been preserved to us.” It contains all kinds of teachings and prayers, which were put in the grave with each dead person to guide him when he was released from his mortal frame. The Egyptians’ most intimate conceptions about the eternal and the genesis of the world are contained in this literary work. These conceptions indeed indicate ideas of the gods similar to those of Greek mysticism. — Of the various deities worshiped in different parts of Egypt, Osiris gradually became the favorite and most universally acknowledged. In him the ideas about the other divinities were summarized. Whatever the Egyptian populace may have thought about Osiris, the *Book of the Dead* indicates that according to the ideas

of priestly wisdom he was a being which could be found in the human soul itself. — This is expressed clearly in everything they thought about death and the dead. When the body is given up to the earth, preserved within the earthly element, then the eternal part of man sets out upon the path to the primordial eternal. It is called to judgment before Osiris, who is surrounded by forty-two judges of the dead. The fate of the eternal in man depends upon the verdict of these judges. If the soul has confessed its sins and is found to be reconciled with eternal righteousness, invisible powers approach it, saying, “The Osiris N. has been purified in the pool which is south of the field of Hotep and north of the field of Locusts, where the gods of verdure purify themselves at the fourth hour of the night and the eighth hour of the day with the image of the heart of the gods, passing from night to day.” Thus within the eternal cosmic order the eternal part of man is addressed as an Osiris. After the title Osiris, the individual name of the person concerned is mentioned. The person who is uniting himself with the eternal cosmic order also calls himself “Osiris.” “I am Osiris N. Growing under the *blossoms of the fig tree* is the name of Osiris N.” Thus man becomes an Osiris. The Osiris-existence is only a perfect stage of development of human existence. It seems obvious that even the Osiris who judges within the eternal



cosmic order is none other than a perfect man. Between human existence and divine existence is a difference in degree and number. At the root of this lies the conception of the Mysteries concerning the mystery of "number." The cosmic being Osiris is One; nevertheless he exists undivided in every human soul. Each man is an Osiris, yet the one Osiris must be represented as a special being. Man is engaged in development; at the end of his evolutionary course lies his existence as a god. Within this conception one must speak of *divinity* rather than of a perfected, completed divine being.

There is no doubt that according to such a conception only one who has already reached the gate of the eternal cosmic order as an Osiris can really enter upon Osiris-existence. So the highest life man can lead must consist in changing himself into an Osiris. In the true man an Osiris must already live as perfectly as possible during mortal life. Man becomes perfect when he lives as an Osiris, when he experiences what Osiris has experienced. In this way the Osiris myth receives its deeper significance. It becomes the example of a man who wishes to awaken the eternal within him. Osiris had been torn to pieces, killed by Typhon. The fragments of his body were cherished and cared for by his consort Isis. After his

death he let a ray of his light fall upon her, and she bore him Horus. Horus took over the earthly tasks of Osiris. He is the second Osiris, still imperfect but progressing toward the true Osiris. — The true Osiris is in the human soul. The latter is of a transitory nature at first. However, its transitory nature is destined to give birth to the eternal. Therefore man may consider himself to be the tomb of Osiris. The lower nature (Typhon) has killed the higher nature in him. Love in his soul (Isis) must cherish and care for the dead fragments; then will be born the higher nature, the eternal soul (Horus), which can progress to Osiris-existence. Whoever strives toward the highest existence must repeat in himself, as a microcosm, the macrocosmic, universal process of Osiris. This is the meaning of the Egyptian “initiation.” The process Plato describes as cosmic, — i.e., that the Creator has stretched the soul of the world upon the body of the world in the form of a cross, and that the cosmic process is a redemption of this crucified soul (see page) — on a small scale this process had to happen to man if he was to be capable of Osiris-existence. The neophyte had to develop himself in such a way that his soul-experience, his development as an Osiris, became identified with the cosmic Osiris process. If we could look into the temples of initiation where people were subjected to the transformation into Osiris, we

would see that what happened there represented microcosmically the creation of the world. Man, who is descended from the "Father," was to give birth in himself to the Son. The spellbound god, whom he actually bore within him, was to be revealed in him. The power of earthly nature suppressed this god within him. First this lower nature had to be buried in order that the higher nature might rise again. From this it becomes possible to interpret what is told of the processes of initiation. The candidate was subjected to secret procedures. By means of the latter his earthly nature was killed and his higher nature awakened. It is not necessary to study these procedures in detail. One must only understand their meaning. And this meaning is contained in the acknowledgment which everyone who has been through initiation could make. He could say: Before me floated the endless perspective, at the end of which lies the perfection of the divine. I felt the power of the divine within me. I buried what holds down this power within me. I died to earthly things. I was dead. As a lower man I had died; I was in the netherworld. I communicated with the dead, that is, with those who already have become part of the circle of the eternal cosmic order. After my sojourn in the nether world I arose from the dead. I overcame death, but now I have become different. I have nothing more to do with transitory nature. My

transitory nature has become permeated by the Logos. I now belong to those who live eternally, and who will sit at the right hand of Osiris. I myself shall be a true Osiris, united with the eternal cosmic order, and judgment over death and life shall be placed in my hand. — The neophyte had to undergo the experience which could lead him to such an acknowledgment. The experience which thus approached man was of the highest kind.

Let us now imagine that a non-initiate hears that someone has undergone such experiences. He cannot know what has really taken place in the soul of the initiate. In his eyes, the initiate has died physically, has laid in the grave and has risen. When expressed in terms of material reality an occurrence which has spiritual reality at a higher stage of existence appears to break through the order of nature. It is a “miracle.” Such a “miracle” was initiation. Whoever wished really to understand it must have awakened within himself powers which would enable him to reach a higher stage of existence. He had to prepare the whole course of his life in order to approach these higher experiences. However they might take place in individual lives, these prepared experiences always had a quite definite, typical form. So the life of an initiate is a typical one. It may be described apart from

the individual personality. Or rather, an individual personality could be characterized only as being on the way toward the divine if he had gone through these definite, typical experiences. As such a personality the Buddha lived with his followers; as such a personality Jesus at first appeared to his community. Today we know of the parallels which exist between the biographies of Buddha and of Jesus. Rudolf Seydel has pointed out these parallels strikingly in his book, *Buddha and Christ*. We need only follow up the details to see that all objections to these parallels are futile.

The birth of Buddha is announced by a white elephant who descends to Maya, the queen. He declares that she will bring forth a divine man who "attunes all people to love and friendship and unites them in an intimate company." In Luke's Gospel is written: "... to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David: and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her and said, 'Hail thou that art highly favored ... Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest.'" Maya's dream is interpreted by the Brahmins, the Indian priests, who know that it signifies the birth of a Buddha. They have

a definite, typical idea of a Buddha. The life of the individual personality will have to correspond to this idea. Correspondingly we read in Matthew 2:1, *et seq.*, that when Herod “had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.” — The Brahmin Asita says of Buddha, “This is the child which will become Buddha, the redeemer, the leader to immortality, freedom and light.” Compare this with Luke 2:5: “And behold there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him ... And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.” It is related of Buddha that at the age of twelve he was lost, and was found again under a tree, surrounded by minstrels and sages of ancient times, whom he was teaching. This corresponds to Luke 2:41-47: “Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the

custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem, and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers." — After Buddha had lived in solitude and had returned, he was received by the benediction of a virgin: "Blessed is the mother, blessed is the father, blessed is the wife to whom thou belongest." But he replied, "Only they are blessed who are in Nirvana," i.e., those who have entered the eternal cosmic order. In Luke 11:2-28 is written: "And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto him, 'Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.' But he said, 'Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.'" In the course of Buddha's life the tempter approaches him, promising him all the kingdoms of the earth. Buddha will have nothing to do with this, answering, "I know well that a kingdom is

appointed to me, but I do not desire an earthly one; I shall become Buddha and make all the world exult for joy." The tempter has to admit, "My reign is over." Jesus answers the same temptation in the words: "Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him." (Matthew 4:10,11) — This description of parallelism might be extended to many other points: the results would be the same. — The life of Buddha ended sublimely. During a journey he felt ill. He came to the river Hiranja, near Kuschinagara. There he lay down on a carpet spread for him by his favorite disciple, Ananda. His body began to shine from within. He died transfigured, a body of light, saying, "Nothing endures." The death of Buddha corresponds with the transfiguration of Jesus: "And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening." At this point Buddha's earthly life ends, but the most important part of the life of Jesus begins here: Passion, Death and Resurrection. The difference between Buddha and Christ lies in what necessitated the continuation of the life of Christ Jesus beyond that of Buddha. Buddha and Christ are not understood by simply throwing them together. (This



will become evident in the subsequent chapters of this book.) Other accounts of the death of Buddha need not be considered here, although they also reveal profound aspects of the subject.

The conformity in the lives of these two redeemers leads to an unequivocal conclusion. What this conclusion must be, the narratives themselves indicate. When the priest sages hear about the manner of the birth they know what is involved. They know that they are dealing with a divine man. They know beforehand what conditions will exist for the personality who is appearing. Therefore his career can only correspond with what they know about the career of a divine man. Such a career appears in their Mystery wisdom, marked out for all eternity. It can be only as it must be. Such a career appears as an eternal law of nature. Just as a chemical substance can behave only in a quite definite way, so a Buddha or a Christ can live only in a quite definite way. His career cannot be described as one would write his incidental biography; rather, it is described by giving the typical features contained for all time in the wisdom of the Mysteries. The legend of Buddha is no more a biography in the ordinary sense, than the Gospels are intended to be an ordinary biography of the Christ Jesus. Neither describes an incidental career; both

describe a career marked out for a world-redeemer. The patterns for both must be sought in the traditions of the Mysteries, not in outward physical history. To those who have perceived their divine nature, Buddha and Jesus are initiates in the most eminent sense. (Jesus is an initiate because the Christ Being incarnates in him.) Thus everything transitory is removed from their lives. What is known about initiates can be applied to them. The incidental events of their lives are no longer described. It is said of them, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (John 1:1,14)

The life of Jesus, however, contains more than the life of Buddha. Buddha's life ends with the transfiguration. The most significant part of the life of Jesus begins after the transfiguration. In the language of the initiates, Buddha reaches the point where divine light begins to shine in man. He stands before the death of the physical. He becomes the cosmic light. Jesus goes further. He does not die physically at the moment the cosmic light transfigures him. At that moment he is a Buddha. But at the same moment he enters upon a stage which finds expression in a higher degree of initiation. He suffers and dies. The physical part of him disappears. But the spiritual, the cosmic

light does not vanish. His resurrection follows. He reveals himself to his community as Christ. At the moment of his transfiguration, Buddha dissolves into the hallowed life of the universal Spirit. Christ Jesus awakens this universal Spirit once more to present existence in a human form. Such an event had formerly taken place in a *pictorial* sense at the higher stages of initiation. Those initiated according to the Osiris myth attained to such a resurrection in their consciousness as a pictorial experience. In the life of Jesus this “great” initiation was added to the Buddha initiation, not as a pictorial experience, but as *reality*. Buddha demonstrated by his life that man is the Logos and that he returns to this Logos, to the light, when his physical part dies. In Jesus the Logos itself became a person. In him the Word became flesh.

What was enacted for the ancient cults of the Mysteries within the Mystery-temples, through Christianity has been grasped as a world-historical fact. His community acknowledged the Christ Jesus, the initiate, initiated in a uniquely great way. He proved to them that the world is divine. For the community of Christ, the wisdom of the Mysteries was indissolubly bound up with the personality of Christ Jesus. The belief that he lived and that those who acknowledge him, belong to him, replaced what would

have been attained previously through the Mysteries. — Henceforth for those in the community of Christ a part of what previously was only to be attained by the methods of the mystics, could be replaced by the conviction that the divine is given in the Word which had been present. The determining factor was no longer only that for which each individual spirit had to undergo a long preparation, but also the account of what they had heard and seen, handed down by those who were with Jesus. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we ourselves have beheld, which our hands have touched, concerning the Word of life ... that which we have *seen and heard*, we proclaim to you, that you may have fellowship with us.” Thus it is written in the first Epistle of John. This immediate reality is to embrace all future generations in a living bond; as a Church it is to extend mystically from generation to generation. In this way we may understand the words of Augustine, “I should not believe the Gospel except as moved by the authority of the Church.” The Gospels, therefore, contain in themselves no evidence of their truth, but they are to be believed because they are founded on the personality of Jesus, and because in a mysterious way the Church draws from this personality the power to make them appear as truth. The Mysteries handed

down through tradition the *means* of coming to the truth; the Christian community propagates this truth itself. Faith in the One, the primordial Initiator was to be added to faith in the mystical forces which light up in man's inner being during initiation. The mystics sought apotheosis; they wished to *experience* it. Jesus was made divine; we must cling to him; then we are participants in his apotheosis within the community established by him: — This became Christian conviction. What was made divine in Jesus, is made divine for his whole community. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:20) The one born in Bethlehem has an *eternal* character. Thus the Christmas antiphon is able to speak of the birth of Jesus as if it took place *every* Christmas: "*Today* Christ is born; *today* the Saviour has come into the world; *today* the angels are singing on earth." — In the Christ-experience a quite definite stage of initiation is to be seen. When the mystic of pre-Christian times went through this Christ-experience, then, through his initiation, he was in a condition enabling him to perceive something spiritual — in higher worlds — for which the material world had no corresponding fact. He experienced what comprises the Mystery of Golgotha in the higher world. Now when the Christian mystic goes through this experience, through initiation, at the same time he

beholds the historical event on Golgotha and knows that in this event, which took place in the world of the senses, is the same content as formerly existed only in the supersensible facts of the Mysteries. What had descended upon the mystics within the Mystery temples in earlier times thus descended upon the community of Christ through the "Mystery of Golgotha." And initiation gives the Christian mystic the possibility of becoming conscious of this content of the "Mystery of Golgotha," while faith causes mankind to participate unconsciously in the mystical current which flowed from the events depicted in the New Testament and has been permeating the spiritual life of humanity ever since.

## **The Gospels**

THE ACCOUNTS of the “Life of Jesus” which can be submitted to historical examination are contained in the Gospels. All that does not come from this source might, in the opinion of one of those who are considered the greatest historical authorities on the subject, Harnack, be “easily written on a quarto page.” But what kind of documents are these Gospels? The fourth, that of John, differs so much from the others that those who believe themselves obliged to follow the path of *historical* research in order to study the subject come to the conclusion: “If John possesses the genuine tradition about the life of Jesus, that of the first three Evangelists (the Synoptists) is untenable; if the Synoptists are right, the fourth Gospel must be rejected as a historical source.” (Otto Schmidel, *Die Hauptprobleme der Leben Jesu-Forschung*, Principal Problems of Research into the Life of Jesus, p. 15.) This is a statement made from the standpoint of the historical investigator. In the present work, where we are dealing with the mystical content of the Gospels, such a point of view is neither to be accepted nor rejected. But attention must certainly be drawn to such an opinion as the following: “Measured by the standard of *consistency*, inspiration, and

completeness, these writings leave very much to be desired; even when measured by the ordinary human standard they suffer from many imperfections." This is the opinion of a Christian theologian (Harnack in *Wesen des Christentums*, The Nature of Christianity). If one agrees that the Gospels have a mystical origin one finds that apparent contradictions can be explained without difficulty, and one also discovers harmony between the fourth Gospel and the other three. None of these writings are *meant* to be mere historical tradition in the ordinary sense of the word. They do not profess to give a historical biography . What they intended to give was already foreshadowed in the traditions of the Mysteries, as the typical life of the Son of God. It was these traditions which were drawn upon, not history. Now it was only natural that these traditions should not be in literal agreement in every Mystery center. Nevertheless the agreement was so close that the Buddhists narrated the life of their divine man in almost the same way as the Evangelists narrated the life of Christ. But naturally there were differences. We need only assume that the four Evangelists drew from four different Mystery traditions. It is evidence of the towering personality of Jesus that in four writers belonging to different traditions, he awakened the belief that he so perfectly corresponded with their type of an initiate that they



were able to describe him as one who lived the typical life marked out in their Mysteries. Each of them described his life according to *his own* Mystery traditions. And if the narratives of the first three Evangelists (the Synoptists) resemble each other, it proves *nothing more* than that they drew upon similar Mystery traditions. The fourth Evangelist saturated his Gospel with ideas in many respects reminiscent of the religious philosopher Philo . This simply proves that he was rooted in the same mystical tradition as was Philo.

— In the Gospels one finds various elements. First, facts are related which appear to lay claim to being historical. Second, parables exist in which the narrative form is used only to portray a deeper truth. And third, teachings meant to be taken as the content of the Christian conception of life, are included. In John's Gospel no *actual parable* is present. The source from which he drew was a mystical school which believed parables to be unnecessary. — The role of professedly historical facts and parables in the first three Gospels is clearly shown in the account of the cursing of the fig tree. In Mark 11:11-14 we read: "And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve. And on the morrow when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: and

seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it he found nothing but leaves; for the time of the figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." In the corresponding passage in Luke's Gospel he relates a *parable* (Luke 13:6, 7): "He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came and sought fruit thereon and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" This parable symbolizes the worthlessness of the old teaching, represented by the barren fig tree. What is meant metaphorically, Mark relates as an apparently historical fact. Therefore we may assume that, in general, facts related in the Gospels are not to be taken as only historical, or as if they were to hold good only in the world of the senses, but as mystical facts, as experiences recognizable only by spiritual vision, and which stem from various mystical traditions. If we admit this, the difference between the Gospel of John and the Synoptists ceases to exist. For mystical interpretation, historical research should not be taken into account. Even if one or the other Gospel were written a few decades earlier or later, to the

mystic all of them are of equal historical worth, John's Gospel as well as the others.

The "miracles" also do not present the least difficulty when interpreted mystically. They are supposed to break through the laws of nature. They do this only when they are considered as occurrences which are supposed to have taken place in the physical, transitory sphere in such a way that ordinary sense-perception could have seen through them without difficulty. But if they are experiences which can be seen through only at a higher level, the spiritual level of existence, then it is a matter of course that they cannot be grasped by the laws of physical nature.

Thus it is first of all necessary to read the Gospels in the right way: then we shall know in what manner they speak of the Founder of Christianity. Their intention is to report in the style in which communications were made through the Mysteries. They narrate in the way a mystic would speak of an initiate. However, they give the initiation as the unique characteristic of one unique Being. And they make the salvation of humanity depend on the fact that men cleave to this uniquely initiated Being. What had come to the initiates was the "Kingdom of God."

This unique Being has brought the Kingdom to all who will cleave to him. What was formerly the personal concern of each individual has become the common concern of all those willing to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord.

We can understand how this came about if we admit that the wisdom of the Mysteries was embedded in the religion of the Israelite people. Christianity arose out of Judaism. We need not be surprised therefore to find engrafted on Judaism together with Christianity, those Mystery-conceptions which we have seen to be the common property of Greek and Egyptian spiritual life. If we examine folk religions we find various ideas about the spiritual. If we trace back to the deeper wisdom of the priests, which in each case proves to be the spiritual nucleus of the differing folk religions, we find agreement everywhere. Plato is aware that he agrees with the priest-sages of Egypt as he sets forth the main content of Greek wisdom in his philosophical conception of the world. It is said that Pythagoras traveled to Egypt and India and was instructed by the sages in those countries. Thinkers who lived in the earlier days of Christianity found so much agreement between the philosophical teachings of Plato and the deeper meaning of Moses' writings that they called Plato the Moses of the Greek tongue.

Thus Mystery wisdom existed everywhere. In Judaism it acquired the form it had to assume if it was to become a world religion. — Judaism awaited the Messiah. It is not surprising that when the personality of a unique initiate appeared, the Jews could only conceive of him as being the Messiah. Indeed, this circumstance sheds light on the fact that what had been an individual concern in the Mysteries became the concern of a whole people. From the beginning the Jewish religion had been a religion of the people. The Jewish people regarded itself as one organism. Its Jao was the God of the whole people. If the Son of this God were to be born he must be the Redeemer of the whole people. The individual mystic was not permitted to be saved by himself; the whole people must share in the redemption. Thus it is rooted in the fundamental ideas of the Jewish religion that One is to die for all. — And it is also certain that there were Mysteries in Judaism which could be brought into the religion of the people, out of the dimness of a secret cult. A fully developed mysticism existed side by side with the priestly wisdom connected with the outer formulas of the Pharisees. This secret Mystery wisdom is described in the same way among the Jews as it is elsewhere. One day when an initiate was speaking of it, his hearers sensed the secret meaning of his words and said, Old man, what hast thou done? O that thou hadst kept

silence! Thou thinkest to navigate the boundless ocean without sail or mast. This what thou art attempting. Wilt thou fly upwards? Thou canst not. Wilt thou descend into the depths? An infinite abyss is yawning before thee. — The Kabbalists, from whom the above is taken, also speak of four rabbis. These four rabbis sought the secret path to the divine. The first died, the second lost his reason, the third caused tremendous desolation, and only the fourth, Rabbi Akiba, entered and returned in peace.

Thus we see that also in Judaism there was a soil in which an initiate of a unique kind could develop. He needed only say to himself: I will not let salvation be limited to a few chosen people. I will let all people participate in this salvation. He had to carry out into the world at large what the elect had experienced in the temples of the Mysteries. He had to be willing to take it upon himself, through his personality, in spirit, to be to his community what the cult of the Mysteries hitherto had been to those who took part in it. Indeed he could not at once give the *experiences* of the Mysteries to the whole community. Neither would he have wished to do so. But he wished to give to all the certainty of what in the Mysteries was perceived to be truth. He wished to cause the life which flowed in the Mysteries to flow through the further historical

evolution of humanity. Thus he would raise mankind to a higher stage of existence. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believe." He wished to plant unshakably in human hearts, in the form of *faith*, the certainty that the divine really exists. A man who stands outside initiation and has this faith certainly will go further than one who is without it. It must have weighed on the heart of Jesus like a nightmare that among those standing outside there may have been many unable to find the way. He wished to lessen the gulf between those to be initiated and the "people." Christianity was to be a means by which everyone could find the way. If anyone is not yet ready, at least he is not cut off from the possibility of sharing, to a certain degree unconsciously, in the stream flowing through the Mysteries. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Even those who cannot yet participate in initiation may enjoy some of the fruits of the Mysteries. Henceforth the Kingdom of God is not dependent on "external observances": "Neither shall they say Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." With Jesus the point in question was not so much how far this or that person advanced in the kingdom of the spirit, as that *all* should be convinced that such a spiritual kingdom exists. "In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your

names are written in heaven.” That is, have faith in the divine; the time will come when you will find it.



## **The Miracle of the Raising of Lazarus**

THERE IS NO DOUBT that among the “miracles” attributed to Jesus very special importance must be attached to the raising of Lazarus at Bethany.

Everything unites in assigning a prominent position in the New Testament to what the Evangelist relates at this point. One must recall that it is related only by John, who claims a very definite interpretation for his Gospel by the significant words with which it opens. John begins with the sentences: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, a glory of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Anyone who places such words at the beginning of his exposition is plainly indicating that he wishes it to be interpreted in an especially profound sense. Anyone who approaches it with merely intellectual explanations, or otherwise in a superficial way, is like the person who thinks that Othello “really” murders Desdemona on the stage. Then what does John wish to convey by his introductory words? He clearly states that he is speaking of something eternal, which existed at the very beginning. He relates facts, but they should not be accepted as the *kind* of facts which eye and ear consider, and upon

which logical reason exercises its art. Behind these facts he conceals the “Word” which exists in the cosmic spirit. For him these facts are the medium through which a higher sense is manifested. And therefore we may assume that in the raising of a man from the dead, a fact which offers the greatest difficulties to the eye, ear and logical reason, is concealed the deepest meaning of all.

Something further must be added here. In his *Life of Jesus* Renan indicated that the raising of Lazarus undoubtedly had a decisive influence on the end of Jesus’ life. From the standpoint Renan takes, such a thought appears impossible. The belief was being circulated among the people that Jesus had raised a man from the dead; why should this fact appear so dangerous to his opponents that they asked the decisive question: Can Jesus and Judaism live side by side? It will not do to assert with Renan: “The other miracles of Jesus were passing events, repeated in good faith and exaggerated by popular report; they were thought no more of after they had happened. But this one was a real event, publicly known, by means of which it was sought to silence the Pharisees. All the enemies of Jesus were angered by the sensation it caused. It is related that they tried to kill Lazarus.” It is incomprehensible why this should be so if Renan was right in his belief that all that occurred at Bethany was

a mock scene intended to strengthen belief in Jesus — “Perhaps Lazarus, still pale from his illness, had himself wrapped in a shroud and laid in the family tomb. These tombs were large rooms hewn out of the rock and entered by a square opening, closed by an immense stone slab. Martha and Mary hurried to meet Jesus and brought him to the tomb before he entered Bethany. The painful emotion felt by Jesus at the tomb of the friend he believed dead (John 11:33–38) might be taken by those present for the agitation and tremors which usually accompanied miracles. It was a popular belief indeed that the divine virtue in a man was epileptic and convulsive in character. To continue the above hypothesis, Jesus wished to see once more the man he had loved, and when the stone had been rolled away, Lazarus came forth in his shroud, his head bound with a napkin. Naturally, this phenomenon was regarded by everyone as a resurrection. Faith knows no other law than what it considers to be true.” Does not such an explanation appear absolutely naive when Renan adds the following view: “Certain indications indeed seem to suggest that causes arising in Bethany helped to hasten Jesus’ death”? Nevertheless a true feeling undoubtedly underlies this last statement by Renan. But with the means at *his* disposal, Renan cannot explain or justify this feeling.

Something of quite special importance must have been done by Jesus at Bethany to justify the following words in reference to it: "Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council, and said, What do we? for this man performs many signs." (John 11:47) Renan also surmises something special: "It must be acknowledged that John's account is essentially different from the reports of miracles of which the Synoptists are full, and which are the fruit of popular imagination. Let us add that John is the only Evangelist with accurate knowledge of the relationship of Jesus with the family at Bethany, and that it would be incomprehensible how a creation of the popular mind could have been inserted in the frame of such personal reminiscences. Therefore it is probable that the miracle in question was not among the entirely legendary ones for which no one is responsible. In other words, I think that something happened at Bethany which was looked upon as a resurrection." Does not this really mean that something happened at Bethany which Renan cannot explain? He entrenches himself behind the words: "At this distance of time, and with only one text bearing obvious traces of subsequent additions, it is impossible to decide whether, in the present case, all is fiction, or whether a real incident at Bethany served as a basis for the rumor." — Are we not dealing here

with something which need only be read in the right way to be truly understood? Then perhaps we should stop speaking of “fiction.”

It must be admitted that the whole account in John’s Gospel is wrapped in a veil of mystery. To gain insight into this we need only demonstrate one point. If the report is to be taken in a literal, physical sense, how are we to understand these words of Jesus: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.”? (John 11:4). This is the customary translation of the words, but the situation would be better realized if we were to translate them thus — as would be correct according to the Greek also: “for the manifestation (revelation) of God, that the Son of God might be revealed thereby.” And what do these other words mean: Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life: he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live”? (John 11:25) It would be trivial to believe that Jesus wished to say that Lazarus had become ill only in order that Jesus might demonstrate his skill through him. And it would be a further triviality to think that Jesus meant to assert that belief in him restores life to someone who is dead in the ordinary sense of the word. For what would be remarkable about a person raised from the dead, if after his resurrection he was the same as

before death? Indeed, what would be the sense of describing the life of such a person in the words: "I am the resurrection and the life"? The words of Jesus at once come to life and make sense when we understand them as the expression of a spiritual occurrence, and then even take them in a certain way *literally* as they stand in the text. Jesus actually says that he is the resurrection that has happened to Lazarus, and that he is the *life* that Lazarus is living. Let us take *literally* what Jesus is according to the Gospel of John. He is the "Word that became flesh." He is the eternal that existed in the beginning. If he is really the resurrection, then the "eternal, primordial" has risen again in Lazarus. We are dealing therefore with the resurrection of the eternal "Word." And this "Word" is the life to which Lazarus has been awakened. We have to do with a case of "illness." But it is not an illness leading to death, but to the "glory of God," that is, to the revelation of God. If the "eternal Word" has risen again in Lazarus then in truth the whole process serves to make God manifest in Lazarus. For through the whole process Lazarus has become another man. The "Word," the Spirit, did not live in him before; now this Spirit lives in him. This Spirit has been born in him. It is true that every birth is accompanied by an illness, the illness of the mother. But this illness does not lead to death, but to new life.

That part of Lazarus becomes “ill” from which the “new man,” permeated by the “Word,” is born.

Where is the tomb from which the “Word” is born? To answer this question we need only remember Plato, who calls man’s body the tomb of the soul. And we need only recall that Plato also speaks of a kind of resurrection when he refers to the coming to life of the spiritual world in the body. What Plato calls the spiritual soul, John calls the “Word.” And for him Christ is the “Word.” Plato might have said, Whoever becomes spiritual has caused the divine to rise from the tomb of his body. And for John this resurrection is what happened through the “Life of Jesus.” It is no wonder then that he causes Jesus to say, “I am the resurrection.”

There can be no doubt that the event at Bethany was an awakening in a spiritual sense. Lazarus became a different person. He was raised to a life of which the “eternal Word” proclaims: “I am this life.” What, then, took place in Lazarus? The Spirit came to life within him. He partook of the life which is eternal. — We need only express his experience of resurrection in the words of those who were initiated into the Mysteries, and at once the meaning becomes clear. What does Plutarch say about the purpose of the

Mysteries? They were designed to enable the soul to withdraw from bodily life and unite with the gods. Schelling describes the feelings of an initiate thus: "The initiate, through the rites which he received, became a link in the magic chain; he himself became a Cabeiri. He was received into the indestructible relationship, joining the army of the higher gods, as ancient inscriptions express it." (Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, Philosophy of Revelation) And the change that took place in the life of a person who had received the rites of the Mysteries cannot be more significantly described than in the words spoken by Aedesius to his disciple, the Emperor Constantine: "If one day you should partake in the Mysteries, you will feel ashamed of having been born only as a man."

Let us saturate our souls with such feelings, and then we shall gain the right relationship to the occurrence at Bethany. We shall then experience something quite special in the narrative of John. A certainty will dawn upon us which no logical interpretation, no attempt at rational explanation, can give. A mystery in the true sense of the word stands before us. Into Lazarus the "eternal Word" has entered. In the language of the Mysteries, he became an initiate. Thus the event related to us must be an act of initiation.



Let us now place the whole event before ourselves as an initiation. Jesus loved Lazarus (John 11:36). This indicates no ordinary affection. The latter would be contrary to the spirit of John's Gospel, in which Jesus is the "Word." Jesus loved Lazarus because he found him ready for the awakening of the "Word" within him. Jesus was connected with the family at Bethany. This simply means that Jesus had prepared everything in that family for the great final act of the drama: the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus was the pupil of Jesus. He was a pupil of such caliber that Jesus could be quite certain that the awakening would be accomplished in him. The final act of the drama of awakening was a pictorial action revealing the Spirit. The person involved in it not only had to understand the words, "Die and come to life," he had to fulfill them himself by a spiritually real action. His earthly part, of which his higher being in the sense of the Mysteries must be ashamed, had to be laid aside. The earthly part had to die a pictorially real death. The fact that his body was then put into a somnambulistic sleep for three days can only be regarded, in contrast to the immensity of the transformation of life which preceded it, as an external event to which a far more significant spiritual one corresponds. This act, however, was indeed also the experience which divided the life of the mystic into two parts. One who does not know from

experience the deeper content of such acts cannot understand them. He can only appreciate them by means of a comparison. The substance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may be condensed into a few words. Anyone who learns these words can say in a certain sense that he knows the content of *Hamlet*. And intellectually he does. But someone who allows all the wealth of Shakespeare's drama to stream in upon him perceives *Hamlet* quite differently. The content of a life, which cannot be replaced by a mere description, has passed through his soul. The idea of *Hamlet* has become an artistic, personal experience within him. — On a *higher level* a similar process is accomplished in man through the magic, significant process of initiation. What he attains spiritually he lives through pictorially. The word "pictorially" is used here in the sense that while an outer event is really accomplished materially, at the same time it is nevertheless a picture. We are not dealing with an unreal, but with a *real* picture. The earthly body has actually been dead for three days. From death comes forth the new life. This life has outlasted death. Man has acquired faith in the new life. — This is what happened with Lazarus. Jesus had prepared him for the awakening. He experienced a pictorially real illness. The latter is an initiation, which after three days leads to a really new life .

Lazarus was ready to accomplish this act. He wrapped himself in the robe of the mystic. He enclosed himself in a condition of lifelessness which was at the same time a pictorial death. And when Jesus came there, the three days had been fulfilled. "Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.'" (John 11:41.) The Father had heard Jesus, for Lazarus had come to the final act of the great drama of cognition. He had perceived how resurrection is attained. An initiation into the Mysteries had been fulfilled.

It was an initiation such as had been understood throughout the ages. It had been demonstrated by Jesus as the initiator. Union with the divine had always been represented in this manner.

In Lazarus Jesus accomplished the great miracle of the transformation of life in the sense of ancient traditions. Through this event Christianity is linked with the Mysteries. Lazarus had become an initiate through Christ Jesus himself. Thereby Lazarus had become able to rise into the higher worlds. He was at the same time both the first Christian initiate and the first to be initiated by Christ Jesus himself. Through his

initiation he had become capable of perceiving that the “Word” which had come to life within him had become a person in Christ Jesus, and thus there stood before him in the personality of his “awakener” the same which had been revealed within him spiritually. — From this point of view the following words of Jesus are significant: “And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 11:42) That is to say, it is a question of revealing that in Jesus the “Son of the Father” lives in such a way that when he awakens his own being in man, man becomes a mystic. In this way Jesus made it plain that the meaning of life lay hidden in the Mysteries, and that they paved the way to this meaning. He is the living Word; in him was personified what had become ancient tradition. And the Evangelist is justified in expressing this in the sentence: In him the Word became flesh. He rightly sees in Jesus himself an *incarnated mystery*. And because of this, John’s Gospel is a mystery. In order to read it rightly we must bear in mind that the facts are spiritual facts. If a priest of an ancient order had written it, he would have described traditional rites. For John, these rites took the form of a person. They became the “Life of Jesus.” Burckhardt, an eminent modern investigator of the Mysteries, in *Die Zeit Konstantins*, The Time of

Constantine, says that they are “matters about which we shall never be clear,” but this is simply because he has not perceived the way to this clarity. If we examine the Gospel of John and behold in the sphere of pictorially physical reality the drama of cognition enacted by the ancients, we are looking upon the Mystery itself.

In the words “Lazarus, come forth,” we can recognize the call by which the Egyptian priest-initiators summoned back to everyday life those who had subjected themselves to the processes of “initiation,” which withdrew them from the world that they might die to earthly things and gain a conviction of the reality of the eternal. But with these words Jesus had revealed the secret of the Mysteries. It is easy to understand that the Jews could not let such an act go unpunished, any more than the Greeks could have refrained from punishing Aeschylus, had he betrayed the secrets of the Mysteries. For Jesus the main point in the initiation of Lazarus was to represent before all “the people which stand by,” an event which, according to ancient priestly wisdom, might be accomplished only in the secrecy of the Mysteries. The initiation of Lazarus was to prepare the way for the understanding of the “Mystery of Golgotha.” Previously only those who “saw” — that is to say, who

were initiated — were able to know something of what was achieved by initiation; but now a conviction of the secrets of higher worlds could also be gained by those who “have not seen and yet have believed.”

Note:

What is described above relates to the old initiations for which it was necessary to remain in a sleep-like state for three days. This is not necessary for a really modern initiation — on the contrary, the latter leads to a more conscious life, and ordinary consciousness is never dimmed during the initiation drama.

## **The Apocalypse of John**

AT THE END of the New Testament stands a remarkable document, the Apocalypse, the secret revelation of Saint John. We need only read the opening words to feel the esoteric character of this book. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God granted him, to show to his servants how the necessary events will shortly run their course; this is sent *in signs* by the angel of God to his servant John." What is revealed here is "sent in signs." Therefore we must not take the literal sense of the words as they stand, but seek for a deeper sense, of which the words are only *signs*. But there are also many other things which point to such a "secret meaning." John addresses himself to *seven* communities in Asia. This cannot mean actual, material communities. For the number *seven* is the sacred symbolic number which must be chosen because of its symbolic meaning. The actual number of the Asiatic communities would have been different. And its esoteric character is further indicated by the manner in which John arrived at the revelation: "I was in the *Spirit* on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a voice like a trumpet, saying; What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven communities." Therefore we are dealing with a

revelation received by John in the *Spirit*. And it is the revelation of *Jesus Christ*. What became revealed to the world through Christ Jesus appears in an esoteric form. Such an esoteric sense therefore must be sought in the teaching of Christ. *This* revelation bears the same relationship to ordinary Christianity as the revelation of the Mysteries in pre Christian times bore to the folk religion. Hence the attempt to treat this Apocalypse as a Mystery appears justified.

The Apocalypse is addressed to seven communities. What does this mean? We need only single out one of the messages to perceive the sense. In the first of these is said: "Write to the angel of the community of Ephesus: The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lights. I know your deeds and what you have suffered and also your patient endurance, and that you will not support those who are evil, and that you have called to account those who call themselves apostles, and are not, and that you have recognized them as false. And you are enduring patiently and building up your work upon my name, and you have not grown weary of it. But I demand from you that you should attain to your highest love. Realize then from what you have fallen, change your thinking and accomplish the highest deeds. If you do not, I will



come and move your light from its place, unless you change your thinking. But this you have, that you despise the deeds of the Nicolaitians, which I also despise. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the communities: To him who is victorious I will give food of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.” (Rev. 2:1-7) — This is the message addressed to the angel of the first community. The angel, who represents the spirit of his community, has entered upon the path marked out by Christianity. He is able to distinguish between the false adherents of Christianity and the true. He wishes to be Christian, and has founded his work on the name of Christ. But it is required of him that he should not bar his own way to the highest love by errors of any kind. He is shown the possibility of taking a wrong course through such errors. Through Christ Jesus the path toward attainment of the divine has been marked out. Patient endurance is needed for further advancement in the sense of the first impulse. It is possible to believe too soon that one has grasped the right sense. This happens if someone allows himself to be led part of the way by Christ and then, after all, leaves this leadership by surrendering himself to false ideas about it. Thereby he relapses into his lower self. He has left the “first love.” The knowledge arising out of material perception may be raised into a higher

sphere, becoming wisdom by being spiritualized and made divine. If it does not reach this height, it remains among transitory things. Christ Jesus has pointed out the path to the Eternal. With unwearied, patient endurance knowledge must follow the path leading to its apotheosis. Lovingly it must follow the steps which transform it into wisdom. The Nicolaitians were a sect who took Christianity too lightly. They saw but one thing: Christ is the divine Word, the eternal wisdom which will be born in man. Therefore they concluded that human wisdom is the divine Word. Hence it follows that one need only pursue human knowledge in order to realize the divine in the world. But the meaning of Christian wisdom cannot be construed thus. The knowledge which begins as human wisdom is as transitory as anything else unless it is changed into divine wisdom. You are not thus, says the "Spirit" to the angel of Ephesus; you have not relied merely upon human wisdom. You have trodden the Christian path with patient endurance. But you must not believe that the very highest love is not needed to attain this goal. For this a love is necessary which far surpasses all love for other things. Only this is the "highest love." The path to the divine is an infinite one, and it must be understood that when the first stage has been reached it can be only the preparation for ascending to ever higher stages. In this way, through the first of

the messages is shown how they should be interpreted. The sense of the others can be found in a similar manner.

John turned and saw “seven golden lights,” and “in the midst of the lights the image of the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his loins; his head and his hair were gleaming white like wool or snow, and his eyes were sparkling in the fire.” We are told (Rev.1:20) that “the seven lights are the seven communities.” This means that the lights are seven different ways of attaining to the divine. All of them are more or less imperfect. And the Son of Man “had seven stars in his right hand” (verse 16). “The seven stars are the angels of the seven communities” (verse 20). Here the “guiding spirits” (daemons) of the wisdom of the Mysteries have become the guiding angels of the “communities.” These communities are represented as bodies for spiritual beings. And the angels are the souls of these “bodies,” just as human souls are the guiding powers of human bodies. The communities are the paths to the divine in the imperfect, and the souls of the communities should become guides along these paths. For this purpose they themselves must grow in such a way that their leader is the being who has the “seven stars” in his right hand. “And out of his mouth

issued a two-edged sharp sword, and his countenance in its glory was like the shining sun." In the Mysteries this sword is also found. The neophyte was terrified by a "drawn sword." This indicates the situation of one wishing to know the divine by experience, so that the "countenance" of wisdom may "shine upon him with a glory like the sun." Through this experience John also goes. It is to be a test of his strength. "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead; and he laid his right hand upon me and said: Do not be terrified" (verse 17). The neophyte must go through experiences which otherwise come to man only when he goes through death. His guide must lead him beyond the region where birth and death have meaning. The initiate enters upon a new life, "and I was dead, and behold, I became alive throughout the cycles of life; and I have the keys of Death and the Realm of the Dead." — Thus prepared, John is lead onward in order to learn the secrets of existence. "After this I looked, and behold, the door to heaven was opened, and the first voice which became audible sounded to me like a trumpet, and said Come up hither, and I will show you what will happen after this." The messages of the seven spirits of the communities announce to John what is to occur in the material, physical world in order to prepare the way for Christianity; what he now sees "in the Spirit" leads him to the spiritual, primal source of things,

hidden behind physical evolution, but which will be realized in a spiritualized age in the near future by means of physical evolution. The initiate experiences now in the Spirit what is to happen in the future. “And immediately I was withdrawn into the realm of Spirit. And I beheld a throne in heaven, and one seated on the throne. And he who sat there appeared like the jasper and carnelian stone; and a rainbow surrounded the throne that looked like an emerald.” In this way the primal source of the material world is described in the pictures in which it clothes itself for the seer. “And in the sphere around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated upon the twenty-four thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white flowing garments, and with golden crowns upon their heads.” (chapter 4, verses 1, 2) — Beings far advanced upon the path of wisdom thus surround the primal source of existence, to gaze on its infinite essence and to bear testimony to it. “And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind. And the first living creature was like a lion, and the second like a bull, the third looked like a human being, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. And each of the four living creatures had six wings, full of eyes all round and within, and day and night they never cease to proclaim: Holy, holy, holy, the God, the Almighty, who was, and is, and is to

be.” It is not difficult to perceive that the four beasts represent the supersensible life underlying the forms of life presented by the material world. Afterward, when the trumpets sound, they raise their voices, that is, when the life expressed in material forms has been transmuted into spiritual life.

In the right hand of him who sits on the throne is the scroll in which the path to the highest wisdom is marked out (chapter 5, verse 1). Only one is worthy to open the scroll. “Behold the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” The scroll has seven seals . The wisdom of man is sevenfold. That it is designated as being sevenfold is again connected with the sacred character of the number seven. The mystical wisdom of Plato designates as *seals* the eternal cosmic thoughts which come to expression in things. Human wisdom seeks for these creative thoughts. But only the scroll which is sealed with them, contains the divine truth. The fundamental thoughts of creation must first be unveiled, the seals must be opened, before what is in the scroll can be revealed. Jesus, the Lion, has power to open the seals. He has given a direction to the great creative thoughts which, through them, leads to wisdom. — The Lamb who was strangled and sacrificed his blood for God;

Jesus, who bore Christ in himself and who thus, in the highest sense, passed through the Mystery of life and death, opens the scroll (chapter 5, verses 9–10). And as each seal is opened (chapter 6) the four living creatures declare what they know. At the opening of the first seal a white horse upon which sits a rider with a bow, appears to John. The first cosmic power, an embodiment of creative thought, becomes visible. It is directed into the right course by the new rider, Christianity. Strife is quieted by the new faith. At the opening of the second seal a red horse appears, on which again there is a rider. He takes peace, the second cosmic power, from the earth so that through sloth humanity may not neglect to cultivate the divine. The opening of the third seal reveals the cosmic power of justice, guided by Christianity; the fourth brings the power of religion, which has received new dignity through Christianity. — The meaning of the four living creatures thus becomes clear. They are the four chief cosmic powers which are to receive new leadership through Christianity, War: the lion; Peaceful Work: the bull; Justice: the being with the human face; and Religious Enthusiasm: the eagle. The meaning of the third being becomes clear when it is said at the opening of the third seal: “A quart of wheat for a shilling, and three quarts of barley for a shilling,” and that the rider holds a balance. At the opening of the

fourth seal a rider becomes visible whose name was "Death, and Hell followed him." Religious justice is the rider (chapter 6, verses 6 and 7).

And when the fifth seal is opened there appear the souls of those who have already acted in the spirit of Christianity. Creative thought itself, embodied in Christianity, is manifested here. But by this Christianity is at first meant only the first community of Christians, which is transitory like other forms of creation. The sixth seal is opened (chapter 7), it is evident that the spiritual world of Christianity is an eternal world. The people seem to be permeated by that spiritual world out of which Christianity itself proceeded. What it has itself created becomes sanctified. "And I heard the number of the sealed: a hundred and forty-four thousand who were sealed of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (chapter 7, verse 4). They are those who prepared for the eternal before Christianity existed, and who were transformed by the Christ impulse. The opening of the seventh seal follows. What *true* Christianity should mean for the world becomes evident. The seven angels who "stand before God" (chapter 8, verse 2) appear. Again these angels are spirits from the ancient Mystery-conceptions transferred to Christianity. They are the spirits who lead to the vision of God in a *truly*



Christian way. Therefore what is next accomplished is a leading to God; it is an “initiation” which is bestowed upon John. The announcements of the angels are accompanied by the signs necessary at initiations. “The first angel sounded and hail came out of fire mingled with blood, and it fell on the earth. And a third of the earth was burnt up, also a third of the trees was burnt up, and all the green grass was burnt up.” And similar things happen at the announcements of the other angels when they sound their trumpets. — At this point we see we are not dealing with an initiation in the old sense but with a new one which should take the place of the old. Christianity should not be confined, like the ancient Mysteries, to a few elect. It should belong to the whole of humanity. It should be a religion of the people; the truth should be given to each one who “has ears to hear.” The ancient mystics were singled out from a great number; the trumpets of Christianity sound for every one who is willing to hear them. Whether or not he draws near, depends upon himself. This is why the terrors accompanying this initiation of humanity are so enormously enhanced. What is to become of the earth and its inhabitants in a distant future is revealed to John at his initiation. Underlying this is the thought that initiates are able to foresee in the higher worlds what is realized only in the future for the lower world.

The seven messages represent the meaning of Christianity for the present age; the seven seals represent what is now being prepared for the future through Christianity. The future is veiled, sealed to the uninitiated; in initiation it is unsealed. When the earthly period is over, during which the seven messages hold good, a more spiritual time will begin. Then life will no longer flow on as it appears in physical shapes, but even outwardly it will be a copy of its supersensible forms. These latter are represented by the four animals and the other images contained in the seals. In a yet more distant future appears that form of the earth which the initiate experiences through the trumpets. Thus the initiate prophetically experiences what is to happen. And one who is initiated in the Christian sense experiences how the Christ impulse penetrates and continues to work in earthly life. And after it has been shown how everything that clings too closely to the transitory to attain true Christianity has met with death, there appears the mighty angel with a little scroll open in his hand, and which he gives to John (chapter 10, verse 9): "And he said to me Take it, and eat: it will be bitter to your stomach but sweet in your mouth like honey." John was not only to *read* the little scroll; he was to absorb it, letting its contents permeate him. What avails any cognition unless man is vitally and

thoroughly permeated by it? Wisdom should become *life*; man should not merely perceive the divine, but become divine himself. Such wisdom as is written in the scroll no doubt causes pain to the transitory nature: “it will be bitter to your stomach;” but so much the more does it make the eternal part happy: “but it will be sweet in your mouth like honey.” — Only through such an initiation can Christianity become actual on the earth. It kills everything belonging to the lower nature. “And their dead bodies will lie in the square of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Christ was crucified.” This refers to the believers in Christ. They will be mistreated by the powers of the transitory world. But it is only the transitory members of human nature that will be ill treated, which the true essence will then have conquered. Thereby their destiny is a copy of the exemplary fate of Christ Jesus. “Spiritually Sodom and Egypt” is the symbol of a life which clings to the external and does not change itself through the Christ impulse. Christ is *everywhere* crucified in the lower nature. Where this lower nature conquers, everything remains dead. Human corpses cover the squares of the cities. Those who overcome the lower nature and bring about an awakening of the crucified Christ, hear the trumpet of the seventh angel: “The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of

our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign from cosmic age to cosmic age" (chapter 11, verse 15). "And the temple of God in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple" (verse 9). In the conception of these events the initiate sees the old struggle between the lower and higher nature renewed. For everything the neophyte formerly had to go through must be repeated in the one who follows the Christian path. As once Osiris was threatened by the evil Typhon, so now the "great Dragon, the old Serpent" (chapter 12, verse 9) must be overcome. The woman, the human soul, gives birth to lower knowledge, which is an adverse power if it does not raise itself to wisdom. Man must pass through that lower knowledge. Here in the Apocalypse it appears as the "old Serpent." In all mystical wisdom from the remotest times the serpent has been the symbol of cognition. Man may be led astray by this serpent, by cognition, if he does not bring to life in him the Son of God who crushes the serpents head. "And the great Dragon was thrown out, that old Serpent, whose name is Devil, and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world: he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (chapter 12, verse 9). In these words one can read what Christianity would be. A new method of initiation. In a new form was to be attained what had been attained

in the Mysteries. In them also the serpent had to be overcome. But this was no longer to take place in the same way. The one, the archetypal Mystery, the Christian Mystery, was to replace the many Mysteries of antiquity. Jesus, in whom the Logos became flesh, was to become the Initiator of the whole of humanity. And this humanity was to become his own community of mystics. Not a separation of the elect but a linking together of all is to occur. Each is to be able to become a mystic according to his maturity. The message sounds forth to all; he who has an ear, hastens to learn the secrets. The voice of the heart is to decide in each individual case. This or that person is not to be introduced individually into the Mystery temples, but the word is to be spoken to all; then some will be able to hear it more clearly than others. It will be left to the daemon, the angel within each human breast, to decide how far he can be initiated. The whole world is a Mystery temple. Blessing is not only to come to those who see the wonderful processes in the special temples for initiation, processes which give them a guarantee of the eternal, but “Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet *believe*.” Even if at first they grope in the dark, nevertheless the light may come to them later. Nothing is to be withheld from anyone; the way is to be open to all. — The latter part of the Apocalypse describes graphically the dangers

threatening Christianity through Antichristian powers, and how the Christian powers must be victorious nevertheless. All other gods are united in the One Christian Divinity: “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it: for the revelation of God lights it, and its light is the Lamb” (chapter 21, verse 23). The mystery of the “Revelation of Saint John” is that the Mysteries shall no longer be kept hidden. “And he said to me: Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the Godhead is near.” — The author of the Apocalypse has set forth what he believes to be the relationship of his church to the churches of antiquity. He wished to express what he thought about the Mysteries in the form of a spiritual Mystery. He wrote his Mystery on the island of Patmos. He is said to have received the “Revelation” in a *grotto*. These details indicate that the revelation was of the character of a Mystery. — Thus Christianity emerged from the Mysteries. In the Apocalypse its wisdom is itself born as a Mystery, but as a Mystery which transcends the frame of the old Mystery world. The unique Mystery is to become the universal Mystery. — It may appear contradictory to say that the secrets of the Mysteries became revealed through Christianity, and that nevertheless a Christian Mystery is to be seen again in the experience of the spiritual visions of the writer of the Apocalypse. The contradiction disappears

at once when we reflect that the secrets of the ancient Mysteries were revealed through the events in Palestine. Through these events was laid bare what previously had been veiled in the Mysteries. A new Mystery has been introduced into the evolution of the world through the appearance of the Christ. The initiate of ancient times experienced, in the spiritual world, how evolution points the way to the as yet "hidden Christ;" the Christian initiate experiences the hidden effects of the "revealed Christ."

## **Jesus and His Historical Background**

THE SOIL OUT of which the spirit of Christianity grew is to be sought in the wisdom of the Mysteries. It was only necessary for the fundamental conviction to become widespread that this spirit must be introduced into *life* in a greater measure than had come to pass through the Mysteries themselves. But such a conviction was present in many circles. We need only look at the rule of life of the Essenes and Therapeutae who had been established long before the beginning of Christianity. The Essenes were a closed Palestinian sect, whose numbers at the time of Christ were estimated at four thousand. They formed a community which required that its members should lead a life which developed a higher self within the soul, and through this bringing about a rebirth. The novice was subjected to a strict test to ascertain whether he was sufficiently mature to prepare himself for a higher life. If he was admitted he had to undergo a period of probation. He was required to take a solemn oath that he would not betray to strangers the secrets of the discipline. The latter was designed to quell the lower nature in man so that the spirit slumbering within him might be awakened more and more. Whoever had experienced the spirit in himself up to a certain stage



rose to a higher degree in the order and enjoyed a corresponding authority conditioned by fundamental convictions and not by external compulsion. — Similar to the Essenes were the Therapeutae, who lived in Egypt. All the relevant details of their discipline are contained in a treatise by the philosopher Philo, *About the Contemplative Life*. (The dispute concerning the authenticity of this work must now be regarded as settled and it may be rightly assumed that Philo truly described the life of a community existing long before Christianity and well known to him. On this subject see G. R. S. Mead's *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*.) We need look at only a few passages from Philo's treatise in order to see what their objective was. "The dwellings of the community are very simple, merely providing shelter against the two great dangers, — the fiery heat of the sun and the icy cold of the air. The dwellings are not close together as are those in towns, for proximity is irksome and unpleasing to those who are seeking solitude; nor are they far apart, because of the fellowship which is so dear to them, and also for mutual help in case of an attack by brigands. In each dwelling is a consecrated room, called a sanctuary or *monasterion* (closet or cell) in which in solitude they are initiated into the mysteries of the *sanctified life* ... They also have works of ancient authors, the founders of their way of thinking, and who left behind them

many details concerning the method used in allegorical interpretation ... The interpretation of the sacred scriptures is based upon the *underlying* meaning in the allegorical narratives.” Thus we see that what had been striven for in the narrower circle of the Mysteries had become the concern of a community. But naturally its strict character has been weakened by being shared. — The communities of the Essenes and Therapeutae form a natural transition from the Mysteries to Christianity. Christianity, however, wished to extend to humanity as a whole what these communities had made the concern of a sect. This of course prepared the way for a still further weakening of its strict character.

From the existence of such sects it becomes evident how far the time was ripe for the comprehension of the Mystery of Christ. In the Mysteries the neophyte was artificially prepared so that at the suitable stage the higher spiritual world would arise in his soul. Within the community of the Essenes or Therapeutae, by means of a suitable way of life, the soul sought to prepare itself for the awakening of the “higher man.” It is then a further step to struggle through to the intimation that a human individuality might have developed to higher and higher stages of perfection in repeated lives on earth. Anyone who had arrived at

such a presentiment of this truth would also be able to feel that in Jesus a being of high spirituality had appeared. The higher the spirituality the greater the possibility of accomplishing something of importance. Thus Jesus' individuality could become capable of accomplishing the deed which is so mysteriously signified in the Gospels by the event of his Baptism by John, and which, by the manner of its presentation, is so clearly marked out as something of the utmost importance. — The personality of Jesus became able to receive into its own soul Christ, the Logos, so that He became flesh in it. Since this Incarnation the "Ego" of Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, and the outer personality is the bearer of the Logos. This event of the "Ego" of Jesus becoming the Christ is represented by the Baptism by John. During the time of the Mysteries, "union with the Spirit" was the concern of a few neophytes only. Among the Essenes a whole community cultivated a life by which its members were able to attain this "union;" through the Christ event something, — that is, the deeds of Christ, — was placed before the whole of humanity so that the "union" became a matter of cognition for all mankind.

## **The Essence of Christianity**

THE FACT that the Divine, the Word, the eternal Logos was no longer met only on a spiritual plane in the dark secrecy of the Mysteries but that in speaking about the Logos they were indicating the historical and human personality of Jesus, must have exercised the deepest influence upon those who acknowledged Christianity. Previously the Logos had been seen as reality only in different stages of human perfection. It was possible to observe the delicate, subtle differences in the spiritual life of the personality and to see in what manner and degree the Logos became living within the individual personalities seeking initiation. A higher degree of maturity had to be interpreted as a higher stage in the evolution of spiritual existence. The preparatory steps had to be sought in a past spiritual life. And the present life had to be regarded as the preparatory stage for future stages of spiritual evolution. The conservation of the spiritual power of the soul and the eternity of that power could be assumed from the Jewish esoteric teaching (*The Zohar*), "Nothing in the world is lost, nothing falls into the void, not even the words and voice of man; everything has its place and destination." The one personality was only a

metamorphosis of the soul which changes from personality to personality. The single life of the personality was considered only as a link in the chain of development reaching forward and backward. Through Christianity this changing Logos is directed from the individual personality to the unique personality of Jesus. What previously had been distributed throughout the world was now united in a unique personality. Jesus became the unique God-Man. In Jesus something *once* was present which must appear to man as the greatest of ideals and with which in the course of man's repeated earthly lives he ought in the future to be more and more united. Jesus took upon himself the apotheosis of the whole of humanity. In him was sought what formerly could be sought only in a man's own soul. What had always been found as divine and eternal in the human personality had been taken from it. And all this eternal could be seen in Jesus. It is not the eternal part in the soul that conquers death and is raised as divine through its own power, but the one God who was in Jesus, will appear and raise the souls. From this it follows that an entirely new significance was given to personality. The eternal, immortal part had been taken from it. Only the personality as such was left. If eternity were not to be denied, immortality must be ascribed to the personality itself. The belief in the soul's eternal

metamorphosis became the belief in personal immortality. The personality gained infinite importance because it was the only thing in man to which he could cling. — Henceforth there is nothing between the personality and the infinite God. A direct relationship with Him must be established. Man was no longer capable of becoming divine himself in a greater or lesser degree; he was simply man, standing in a direct but outward relationship to God. Those who knew the ancient Mystery-conceptions were bound to feel that this brought quite a new note into the conception of the world. Many people found themselves in this position during the first centuries of Christianity. They knew the nature of the Mysteries; if they wished to become Christians they were obliged to come to terms with the old method. This brought them into difficult conflicts within their souls. They tried in the most varied ways to find a balance between the divergent world conceptions. This conflict is reflected in the writings of early Christian times, both of pagans attracted by the sublimity of Christianity and of those Christians who found it hard to give up the ways of the Mysteries. Christianity grew slowly out of Mystery wisdom. On the one hand Christian convictions were presented in the form of the Mystery truths, and on the other the Mystery wisdom was clothed in Christian words. Clement of Alexandria (died 217 A.D.), a

Christian writer whose education had been pagan, provides an instance of this: "Thus the Lord did not hinder us from doing good while keeping the Sabbath, but allowed us to communicate of those divine mysteries, and of that holy light, to those who are able to receive them. He did not disclose to the many what did not belong to the many; but to the few to whom he knew that they belonged, who were capable of receiving and being moulded according to them. But secret things are entrusted to speech, not to writing, as God confided the unutterable mystery to the Logos, not to the written word." — "God gave to the church some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." By the most diverse means personalities tried to find the way from the ancient conceptions to the Christian ones. And each of them, believing he was on the right path, called the others heretics. Side by side with the latter, the Church grew stronger as an external institution. The more power it gained the more the path recognized as the right one by the decisions of councils took the place of personal investigation. It was for the Church to decide who deviated too far from the divine truth which it guarded. The concept of a "heretic" took firmer and firmer shape. During the

first centuries of Christianity the search for the divine path was a much more personal matter than it became later. A long distance had to be traveled before Augustine's conviction could become possible: "I should not believe the Gospel except as moved by the authority of the Church."

The conflict between the method of the Mysteries and that of the Christian religion acquired a special stamp through the various "Gnostic" sects and writers. We may class as Gnostics all the writers of the first Christian centuries who sought for a deeper spiritual sense in Christian teachings. (A brilliant account of the development of Gnosis is given in G. R. S. Mead's book mentioned above, *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten*.) We understand the Gnostics when we look upon them as saturated with the ancient wisdom of the Mysteries and striving to understand Christianity from that point of view. For them Christ is the Logos. As such He is above all of a spiritual nature. In His primal essence He cannot approach man from without. He must be awakened in the soul. But the historical Jesus must bear some relationship to this spiritual Logos. This was the crucial question for the Gnostics. Some settled it in one way, some in another. The essential point common to them all was that to arrive at a true understanding of the Christ-idea, mere historical



tradition was not sufficient, but that it must be sought either in the wisdom of the Mysteries or in the Neoplatonic philosophy which was derived from the same source. The Gnostics had faith in human wisdom, and believed it capable of bringing forth a Christ by whom the historical Christ could be measured. In fact, through the former alone could the latter be understood and beheld in the right light.

From this point of view the doctrine given in the books of Dionysius the Areopagite is of special interest. It is true that there is no mention of these writings until the sixth century. But it matters little when and where they were written; the point is that they give an account of Christianity which is clothed in the language of Neoplatonic philosophy, and presented in the form of a spiritual vision of the higher world. In any case this is a form of presentation belonging to the first Christian centuries. In olden times this presentation was handed on in the form of oral tradition; in fact the most important things were not entrusted to writing. Christianity thus presented could be regarded as reflected in the mirror of the Neoplatonic world conception. Sense-perception dims man's spiritual vision. He must go beyond the material world. But all human concepts are derived primarily from observation by the senses. What man observes

with his senses he calls existent; what he does not so observe he calls non-existent. Therefore if he wishes to open up an actual view of the divine he must go beyond existence and non-existence, for as he conceives them these also have their origin in the sphere of the senses. In this sense God is neither existent nor non-existent. He is super-existent. Consequently He cannot be attained by means of ordinary perception, which has to do with existing things. We must be raised above ourselves, above our sense-observation, above our reasoning logic if we are to find the bridge to spiritual conception; then we are able to get a glimpse into the perspectives of the divine. — But this super-existent divinity has brought forth the Logos, the foundation of the universe, filled with wisdom. Man's lower powers are able to reach Him. He is present in the structure of the world as the spiritual Son of God; He is the mediator between God and man. He may be present in man in various stages. For instance, He may be realized in an external institution, in which those variously imbued with His spirit are grouped into a hierarchy. A "Church" of this kind is the material reality of the Logos, and the power which lives in it lived personally in the Christ become flesh, in Jesus. Thus through Jesus the Church is united to God; in Him lies its meaning and crowning-point.

One thing was clear to all Gnosis: one must come to terms with the idea of Jesus as a personality. Christ and Jesus must be brought into relationship with each other. Divinity was taken from human personality and must be recovered in one way or another. It must be possible to find it again in Jesus. The mystic was dealing with a degree of divinity within himself, and with his own earthly material personality. The Christian was dealing with the latter and also with a perfect God, far above all that is humanly attainable. If we hold firmly to this conception a fundamentally mystical attitude of soul is only possible when the soul finds the higher spiritual element in itself and its spiritual eye is opened so that the light issuing from the Christ in Jesus falls upon it. The union of the soul with its highest powers is at the same time union with the historical Christ. For mysticism is a direct feeling and experience of the divine within the soul. But a God far transcending everything human can never dwell in the soul in the real sense of the word. Gnosis and all subsequent Christian mysticism represent the effort in one way or another to lay hold of that God and to apprehend Him directly in the soul. A conflict in this case was inevitable. In reality it was only possible for a man to find *his own* divine part; but this is a human-divine part, that is, a divine part at a certain stage of development. Yet the Christian God is a

definite one, perfect in Himself. It was possible for a person to find in himself the power to strive upward to this God, but he could not say that what he experienced in his own soul at any stage of development was one with God. A gulf appeared between what it was possible to perceive in the soul and what Christianity described as divine. It is the gulf between knowledge and belief, between cognition and religious feeling. This gulf does not exist for a mystic in the old sense of the word. He knows that he can comprehend the divine only by degrees, and he also knows why this is so. It is clear to him that this gradual attainment is a real attainment of the true, living divinity and he finds it difficult to speak of a perfect, isolated divine principle. A mystic of this kind does not wish to recognize a perfect God, but he wishes to experience the divine life. He wishes to become divine himself; he does not wish to gain an external relationship to the Godhead. It is of the essence of Christianity that its mysticism in this sense starts with an assumption. The Christian mystic seeks to behold divinity within himself, but he must look to the historical Christ as his eyes do to the sun; just as the physical eye says to itself, By means of the sun I see what I have power to see, so the Christian mystic says to himself, I will intensify my innermost being in the direction of divine vision, and the light which makes

such vision possible is given in the Christ who has appeared. He *is*, and through this I am able to rise to the highest within myself. In this the Christian mystics of the Middle Ages show how they differ from the mystics of the ancient Mysteries. (See my book, *Die Mystik im Aufgange des neuzeitlichen Geisteslebens*. Berlin, 1901, *Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age*, Englewood, New Jersey, 1960, Volume 3 of the Centennial Edition of the Written Works of Rudolf Steiner, 1861-1961.)

## **Christianity and Pagan Wisdom**

AT THE TIME of the first beginnings of Christianity there appear in ancient pagan culture conceptions of the world which seem to be a continuation of the Platonic way of thinking, and which may be understood as a more inward, spiritual Mystery wisdom. Such conceptions started with Philo of Alexandria (B.C. 25–A.D. 50). From his point of view the processes leading to the divine take place in the innermost part of the human soul. One could say that the mystery temple in which Philo seeks his initiations is simply and solely the innermost part of his being, and its higher experiences. In his case processes of a purely spiritual nature replace the procedures which took place in the Mystery centers. According to Philo sense-observation and cognition gained through the logical intellect, do not lead to the divine. They relate merely to what is transitory. But there is a path by which the soul may rise above these methods of cognition. It must step out of what it accepts as its ordinary “ I .” It must be removed from this “ I .” Then it enters a state of spiritual exaltation and illumination in which it no longer knows, thinks and cognizes in the ordinary sense. For it has become merged with the divine, identified with it. The divine is experienced in

its essence, which cannot be formed in thoughts or imparted in concepts. It is *experienced*. One who experiences it knows that he can communicate this experience only if he is able to imbue his words with life. The world is a reflected image of this mystical reality, experienced in the innermost recesses of the soul. The world has come forth from the invisible, inconceivable God. A direct image of this Godhead is the wisdom-filled harmony of the world, out of which material phenomena arise. This wisdom-filled harmony is the spiritual image of the Godhead. It is the divine Spirit diffused in the world; cosmic reason, the Logos, the Offspring or Son of God. The Logos is the mediator between the world of the senses and the inconceivable God. When man steep himself in cognition, he unites himself with the Logos. The Logos becomes embodied in him. The spiritually developed personality is the bearer of the Logos. Above the Logos is God; beneath is the transitory world. Man is called upon to link the two. What he experiences in his innermost being as spirit, is the cosmic Spirit. These ideas are directly reminiscent of Pythagorean thought. — The center of existence is sought in the inner life. But this inner life is conscious of its cosmic significance. Augustine's statement, "We see all created things because they are; and they are because God sees them," derives from a way of

thinking essentially similar to that of Philo. — And in describing *what* and *how* we see, Augustine adds significantly, “Because they are, we see them outwardly: and because they are perfect, we see them inwardly.” We find the same fundamental idea in Plato . Philo, like Plato, sees in the destiny of the human soul the closing act of the great cosmic drama, the awakening of the spellbound God. He describes the inner deeds of the soul in the following words: The wisdom within man followed “the ways of his Father, and shaped the different forms, looking to the archetypal patterns.” It is not a personal matter when man shapes such forms within himself. These forms are the eternal wisdom, they are the cosmic life. This is in harmony with the interpretation of the folk myths in the light of the Mysteries. The mystic searches for the deeper truth in the myths . And as the mystic treats the myths of paganism, Philo handles Moses’ story of the creation. For him the Old Testament accounts are images of inner soul processes. The Bible relates the creation of the world. Whoever accepts it as a description of outer events, knows only half of it. Certainly it is written, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” But the true inner sense of such words



must be experienced in the depths of the soul. God must be found within; then He appears as the “archetypal essence sending forth myriads of rays, none visible to sense, all to the mind.” This is how Philo expresses himself. In Plato’s *Timaeus* the words are almost identical with those of the Bible: “And when the Father that engendered the universe perceived it in motion and alive, and a thing of joy to the eternal gods, He too rejoiced.” In the Bible we read, “and God saw that it was good.” — For Plato, for Mystery wisdom, as well as for the Bible, cognition of the divine means to experience the process of creation as one’s own destiny. Thus the story of creation and the story of the soul striving toward its apotheosis, flow into one. Philo is convinced that Moses’ account of the creation may be used to tell the story of the soul which is seeking God. Everything in the Bible acquires a profoundly symbolic meaning when seen from this point of view. Philo becomes the interpreter of this symbolic meaning. He reads the Bible as the story of the soul.

We may say that Philo’s manner of reading the Bible is in harmony with the trend of his time, which originated in the wisdom of the Mysteries; indeed he relates that the Therapeutae interpreted ancient writings in the same way. “They have also works of

ancient authors who were the founders of their way of thinking, and left behind them many monuments of the method used in *allegorical* interpretation ... the interpretation of the sacred scriptures is based upon the underlying meaning in the allegorical narratives.” . Thus Philo’s goal was to discover the underlying meaning of the “allegorical” narratives in the Old Testament.

Let us imagine where such an interpretation could lead. We read the account of creation, and find in it not only a narrative of outward events, but a representation of the ways which the soul must take to reach the divine. Thus as a microcosm, the soul must repeat in itself the ways of God, and its mystical striving for wisdom can take only this form. The drama of the universe must be enacted in every soul. The soul life of the mystic is the *fulfillment* of the prototype given in the account of creation. Moses wrote not only to recount historical facts, but to represent pictorially the ways the soul must take if it desires to find God.

All this, in Philo’s conception of the world, is contained *within* the human spirit. Man experiences within *himself* what God has experienced in the world. The Word of God, the Logos, becomes an experience of the soul. God led the Jews out of Egypt into the

Promised Land; He made them undergo trials and privations before bestowing the Promised Land upon them. This is the outward event. Let us experience it inwardly. From the land of Egypt, the transitory world, passing through privations which lead to the suppression of sensuous experience and into the promised land of the soul, we reach the eternal. With Philo all this is an inner process. The God Who was poured out into the world, celebrates His resurrection in the soul, if His creative word is understood and re-created in the soul. Then within himself, man has given spiritual birth to God, to the Spirit of God that became Man, to the Logos, to Christ. In this sense, cognition, for Philo and those who thought like him, was a birth of Christ within the world of spirit. The Neoplatonic conception of the world, which developed contemporaneously with Christianity, was a continuation of Philo's method of thought. Let us see how Plotinus (204–269 A.D.) describes his spiritual experience:

“Many times it has happened: Lifted out of the body into myself; becoming external to all other things and self-centered; beholding a marvelous beauty; then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order; enacting the noblest life, acquiring identity with the divine; rooted within it; attaining the strength to

set myself above the higher world: yet, there comes the moment of descent from spiritual vision to reasoning, and after that reposing in God, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did my soul ever enter into my body, the soul which, in its essence, is the high thing it has shown itself to be,” and “What can it be that has brought the souls to forget the Father, God, and, though members of the Divine and entirely of that world, to ignore at once themselves and it? The evil that has overtaken them has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of creation, and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self-ownership. They conceived a pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged in their own self-glorification; thus they were hurried down the wrong path, and in the end, drifting further and further, they came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine. Just as children who are immediately torn from their parents, and have for a long time been nurtured at a great distance from them, become ignorant both of themselves and their parents.” In the following words Plotinus describes the path of development the soul should seek: “Let not merely the enveloping body be at peace, the body’s turmoil stilled, but all that lies around; earth at peace, and sea at peace, and air and the very heavens be still. Let the soul be observed, externally as it were,

diffusing and flowing into the quiescent cosmos, permeating it from all sides, and pouring in its light. As the rays of the sun, throwing their brilliance upon a lowering cloud make it gleam all gold, so the soul entering body of the heaven-opened world, bestows life and immortality.”

It follows that this conception of the world has a profound similarity to Christianity. Among those who acknowledge the community of Jesus it is said, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the *Word of life* ... declare we unto you.” (I John 1: 1-3.) In the same way it might be said in the sense of Neoplatonism, that which was from the beginning, which cannot be heard or seen, must be spiritually experienced as the word of life. — The development of the old world conception thus is split. In Neoplatonism and similar conceptions of the world it leads to a concept of Christ related only to the spiritual realm, and on the other hand it leads to a fusion of this concept of Christ with a historical manifestation, the personality of Jesus. The writer of the Gospel of John may be said to unite these two world conceptions. “In the beginning was the Word.” He shares this conviction with the Neoplatonists. The Neoplatonists

conclude that the Word becomes spirit in the innermost soul. The writer of John's Gospel, and with him the community of Christians, conclude that the Word became flesh in Jesus. The more intimate sense, in which alone the Word could become flesh was provided by the whole development of the old world conceptions. Plato says of the Macrocosm: God has stretched the soul of the world on the body of the world *in the form of a cross*. This soul of the world is the Logos. If the Logos is to become flesh He must repeat the cosmic process in physical existence. He must be nailed to the Cross and rise again. This most significant thought of Christianity had long before been outlined as a spiritual representation in the old world conceptions. This became a personal experience of the mystic during "initiation." The Logos become Man had to experience this deed as a fact, valid for the whole of humanity. Something which was a Mystery process in the development of the old wisdom becomes historical fact through Christianity. Thus Christianity became the fulfillment not only of what the Jewish prophets had predicted, but also of what had been pre-formed in the Mysteries. — The Cross of Golgotha is the Mystery cult of antiquity condensed into a fact. We find the Cross first in the ancient world conceptions; at the starting-point of Christianity it meets us within a unique event which is to be valid for

the whole of humanity. From this point of view the mystical element in Christianity can be grasped. Christianity as mystical fact is a stage of development in the process of human evolution; and the events in the Mysteries and their effects are the preparations for this mystical fact.

## **Augustine and the Church**

THE FULL FORCE of the conflict which was enacted in the souls of Christian believers during the transition from paganism to the new religion is shown in the person of Augustine (354-430). When we see how this conflict has become resolved in the spirit of Augustine we are enabled in a mysterious way to penetrate the spiritual struggles of Origin, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome and others.

Augustine was a personality in whom deep spiritual needs developed out of a passionate nature. He passed through pagan and half-Christian ideas. He suffered deeply from the most dreadful doubts which can attack a man who has felt the impotence of many varieties of thought in the face of spiritual problems, and who has tasted the depressing effect of the question, Can man know anything at all?

At the beginning of his struggles Augustine's thoughts clung to the transitory things of the material world. He could conceive of the spiritual only in material images. It is a deliverance for him when he rises above this stage. He describes this in his *Confessions*: "When I desired to think upon my God, I



knew not how to think of Him except as a mass of bodies, for what was not of such a nature seemed to me to be nothing. This was the greatest and almost the only cause of my inevitable error.” Thus he indicates the point which a person is bound to reach who is seeking the true life in the spirit. There are thinkers — and they are not few — who maintain that it is impossible to arrive at pure thought, free from any material substance. These thinkers confuse what they believe they ought to say about their own soul life with what is humanly possible. On the contrary, the truth is that it is only possible to arrive at higher cognition when thought has been freed from all material substance; when a soul life has been developed in which images of reality do not cease when their demonstration in sense-impressions comes to an end. Augustine relates how he achieved spiritual vision. Everywhere he asked where the “divine” was to be found. “I asked the earth and it said, I am not He; and all things that are in the earth confessed the same. I asked the ocean and the depths and all that lives in them, and they answered me: We are not thy God. Seek above us. I asked the fleeting winds, and the whole air, with all its inhabitants made answer: The philosophers who seek for the essence of things in us are deceived. We are not God. I asked the heavens, the sun, moon and stars, and they said: Neither are we

the God whom thou seekest.” And Augustine perceived that there is but one thing which can answer his question about the divine: his own soul. The soul said, No eyes nor ears can impart to you what is in me. for I alone can tell you, and I tell you in such a way that doubt is impossible. “Men may doubt whether vital force lives in air or in fire, but who can doubt that he himself lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows and judges? If he doubts, it is a proof that he is alive, he remembers why he doubts, he understands that he doubts, he will assure himself of something, he thinks, he knows that he knows nothing, he judges that he must not accept anything hastily.” External things do not defend themselves when their essence and existence are denied. But the soul does defend itself. It could not be doubtful of itself unless it existed. By its doubt it confirms its own existence. “We are and we perceive our existence and we love our own existence and cognition. On these three points no error disguised as truth can trouble us, for we do not apprehend them with our bodily senses like physical things.” Man learns about the divine by bringing his soul to perceive itself as spiritual in order that it may find its way as spirit into the spiritual world. Augustine had struggled through to this perception. Out of such an attitude of mind grew the desire in pagan personalities seeking cognition, to

knock at the portal of the Mysteries. In the age of Augustine such convictions could lead a man to become a Christian. Jesus, the Logos become man, had shown the path which must be followed by the soul if it would attain the goal of which it must speak when in communion with itself. In 358 at Milan Augustine received the teachings of Ambrose. All his doubts about the Old and New Testaments vanished when the most important passages were interpreted by his teacher, not in a merely literal sense, but “were spiritually laid open and expounded by him, the mystical veil thereof being removed.” What had been guarded in the Mysteries was embodied for Augustine in the historical tradition of the Gospels and in the community where that tradition was preserved. By degrees he comes to a conviction regarding Church doctrine, of which he says, “I felt it was with moderation and honesty that it commanded things to be *believed* that were not demonstrated.” He arrives at the idea, “Who could be so blind as to say that the Church of the Apostles deserves to have no faith placed in it, when it is so loyal and is supported by the conformity of so many brethren; when these have handed down their writings to posterity so conscientiously, and when the Church has so strictly maintained the succession of teachers down to our present bishops?” Augustine’s method of thinking told

him that since the Christ event other conditions had begun for souls seeking the spirit in place of those which had existed previously. For him it was firmly established that in Christ Jesus there had been revealed in the outer historical world what the mystic had sought through preparation in the Mysteries. One of his most significant utterances is the following: "What is now called the Christian religion already existed among the ancients, and was not lacking at the very beginnings of the human race. When Christ appeared in the flesh, the true religion already in existence received the name of Christian." Two paths of development were possible for such a mode of thinking. One is that if the human soul develops within it the forces leading it to the cognition of its true self, if it but goes far enough, it will also come to cognition of the Christ and of everything connected with him. This would have been a Mystery knowledge enriched through the Christ event. The other way is that actually taken by Augustine, by which he became the great example for his successors. It consists in cutting off the development of the forces of the soul at a certain point and in receiving the ideas connected with the Christ event from written accounts and oral traditions. Augustine rejected the first way as springing from pride of soul; he thought the second way was the way of true humility. Thus he says to

those who wished to follow the first way: “You may find peace in the truth, but for this, humility is needed, which does not suit your proud neck.” On the other hand he was filled with boundless inward happiness by the fact that since the “appearance of Christ in the flesh” it was possible to say that experience of the spiritual can be attained by every soul which goes as far as it can in seeking within itself, and then, in order to reach the highest, has *faith* in what the written and oral traditions of the community of Christians tell about the Christ and his revelation. On this point he says: “What bliss, what abiding enjoyment of supreme and true good is offered to us, what serenity, what a breath of eternity! How shall I describe it? It has been expressed, as far as it could be, by those great incomparable souls who we admit have beheld and still behold ... We reach a point at which we acknowledge how true is what we have been commanded to believe and how well and beneficently we have been brought up by our mother the Church, and of what benefit was the milk given by the Apostle Paul to the little ones ...” (It is beyond the scope of this book to give an account of the alternative method of thinking which is evolved from the Mystery knowledge enriched through the Christ event. The description of this method will be found in my outline of a *Geheimwissenschaft*.) — Whereas in pre-Christian

times one who wished to seek the spiritual foundations of existence was necessarily directed to the way of the Mysteries, Augustine was able to say, even to those souls who could find no such path within themselves: Go as far as you can on the path of *cognition* with your human powers; from there, *faith* (belief) will carry you up into the higher spiritual regions. — It was only going one step further to say: It is in the nature of the human soul to be able to arrive only at a certain stage of cognition through its own powers; from there it can advance further only through faith, through belief in the written and oral tradition. This step was taken by the spiritual movement which assigned to *natural perception* a certain sphere above which the soul could not rise by its own efforts, but everything which lay beyond this sphere was made an object of *belief* which has to be supported by written and oral tradition, and by faith in its representatives. Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), the greatest teacher of the Church, has set forth this doctrine in the most varied ways in his writings. Human perception can only attain to that which led Augustine to self knowledge, to the certainty of the divine. The nature of the divine and its relation to the world is given by revealed theology, which is not accessible to man's own perception, and as an article of faith, is superior to all cognition.

The origin of this point of view may be observed in the world conception of John Scotus Erigena, who lived in the ninth century at the court of Charles the Bald, and who represents a natural transition from early Christianity to the point of view of Thomas Aquinas. His conception of the world is expressed in the sense of Neoplatonism. In his treatise, *De Divisione Naturae*, Erigena has elaborated the teaching of Dionysius the Areopagite. This teaching started with a God far above the transitory things of the material world and it derived the world from Him. Man is involved in the transformation of all beings toward this God, Who finally attains to what He was from the beginning. Everything falls back again into the Godhead which has passed through the universal process and finally has become perfected. But in order to reach this goal man must find the way to the Logos who became flesh. In Erigena this thought leads to another, that faith in the content of the writings which give an account of the Logos, leads to salvation. Reason and the authority of the Scriptures, *belief* and *cognition*, stand side by side. The one does not contradict the other, but faith must bring that to which knowledge alone can never raise itself.

The *cognition* of the eternal which the ancient Mysteries withheld from the multitudes, when

presented in this way by Christian thought and feeling, became an *article of faith* which by its very nature was related to something unattainable by mere knowledge. It was the conviction of the pre-Christian mystic that to him was given cognition of the divine, and to the people, a faith expressed in imagery. Christianity came to the conviction that God has given His wisdom to mankind through His revelation, and man attains an image of the divine revelation through his cognition. The wisdom of the Mysteries is a hot-house plant which is revealed to a few mature individuals; Christian wisdom is a Mystery revealed as cognition to none, but as an article of faith it is revealed to all. In Christianity the viewpoint of the Mysteries lived on. But it lived on in an altered form. All, not only the special individual, were to share in the truth. But it should so happen that at a certain point man perceived his inability to penetrate further by means of cognition, and from there on ascended to faith. Christianity brought the content of the Mysteries out of the darkness of the temple into the clear light of day. The *one* spiritual stream within Christianity outlined here led to the idea that this content must necessarily be retained in the form of *faith*.



## **Comments by the Author**

Comment 1: The words of Ingersoll are introduced at this point in the book, not only with reference to those people who declare them to be word for word their own conviction. Many people do not do so, and yet their ideas about natural phenomena and man are such that if they were logical they would have to arrive at these statements. It does not matter what anyone declares to be his conviction theoretically, but it matters whether this conviction really follows from his whole method of thought. Someone may even abhor or laugh at the above words; but if he forms for himself an explanation which takes into account only the outer facts without rising to the spiritual background underlying natural phenomena, as a logical consequence he will construct a materialistic philosophy out of it.

Comment 2: For those who can observe rightly the "Spirit of Nature" speaks powerfully in the facts which are at present being dealt with by the clichés "struggle for existence," "omnipotence of natural selection," etc. But not in the *opinions* which science forms about them today. The first of these circumstances contains the reason why natural

science will gain increasingly widespread attention. From the second circumstance it follows that the opinions of science need not be accepted as essential to cognition of the facts. The possibility of being tempted by the latter is, however, immeasurably great at the present time.

Comment 3: It should not be concluded, from remarks such as those regarding the sources of the Gospel of Luke etc., that the author of this book underestimates purely historical research. This is not the case. It is absolutely justified, but it should not be intolerant of the method of thinking which proceeds from spiritual points of view. In this book no value is placed on bringing in quotations at every possible point, but whoever *wishes* to do so can see clearly that an *all-round* and really unprejudiced judgment will find no contradiction anywhere between what is said here and what is truly established historically. Admittedly, anyone who wants to be one-sided, and holds this or that theory to be what has been established as certainty, may find that the assumptions of this book “do not hold their own” from the “scientific” standpoint, but are “without any objective foundation.”

Comment 4: It is said above that those whose spiritual eyes are opened can *behold* the realm of the spiritual world. It should not, however, be concluded from this that a logical judgment about the results of initiation can be formed only by one who himself has “spiritual eyes.” These are necessary only for research. When the results of the research are communicated, *everyone* can understand who allows his intelligence and unprejudiced sense of truth to speak. Such a person also can use these results in life and gain satisfaction from them without as yet possessing “spiritual eyes” himself.

Comment 5. The “sinking into the mire” of which Plato speaks must also be interpreted in the sense of the previous comment.

Comment 6: What is said about the impossibility of communicating teachings of the Mysteries refers to the fact that they cannot be communicated *in the form* in which the initiate experiences them to anyone who is unprepared. But they always have been communicated in the form in which they could be understood by the non-initiate. For example, the myths provided the *ancient form* for communicating the content of the Mysteries in a generally comprehensible manner.

Comment 7: In ancient mysticism “Mantic” signifies everything relevant to knowledge gained through “spiritual eyes.” On the other hand, “Telestic” is the indication of the paths which lead to initiation.

Comment 8: “Cabeiri” in ancient mysticism, are beings whose consciousness is far above that of modern man. Schelling wishes to say that through initiation man himself transcends his present consciousness and enters a higher one.

Comment 9: Regarding the significance of the number seven, enlightenment may be gained from my book *Geheimwissenschaft*, Leipzig 1910. [26th edition, Stuttgart 1955.]

Comment 10: The meanings of the apocalyptic symbols can be only very briefly indicated here. Of course one could enter much more deeply into all these things. However, this does not lie within the scope of this book.